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## The Romance of a Poor Young Man.

BY OCTAVE FEUILLET.

SURSUM CORDA—LIFT UP YOUR HEARTS.

PARIS, April 20, 185—.

THIS is the second night I have passed in this wretched chamber, gazing with vacant eyes into the empty fireplace, listening unconsciously to the noises in the street, a feeling more lonely in this great city, more desolate and despairing than the shipwrecked mariner on his piece of plank in mid-ocean. Away with this weakness! I will look my destiny in the face, and thus deprive it of its spectral air!

I will also open my heart to the only confidant whose pity will not offend me, to this last friend whom I see in my looking-glass. I will write my thoughts, and my life, not with a puerile minuteness, but without any serious omission, and especially without falsehood. I will love this journal; it shall be like a fraternal echo which shall delude my solitude, and it shall be at the same time a second conscience, warning me to do nothing of which I cannot write with a firm hand.

I now recall with a sad eagerness a thousand incidents in my life, the meaning of which I should have understood long ago, had not my eyes been shut by filial respect, and the indifference of a happy idleness. The constant and profound melancholy of my mother is explained to me; I also understand her distaste of the world and her simple dress, the object of so much raillery and even anger on my father's part: "You look like a servant," he once said to her.

Our domestic life was often disturbed by serious disputes between my father and mother, though I was never an actual witness of them. His irritated and imperious tones, and my mother's supplicating voice in reply, and her stifled sobs, were all I could hear.

I attributed these quarrels to my father's violent and fruitless efforts to reawaken in my mother a taste for scenes of gayety and display which she had once loved as much as one of her gentle nature could love them, but into which she ac-

companied my father with more and more repugnance. After each of these disputes my father seldom failed to buy some beautiful article of jewelry, which my mother would find placed under her napkin at table, but which she never wore. One day in the middle of winter she received from Paris a large box of jewels; she thanked my father for the gift with great warmth, but when he had left the room, I saw her clasp her hands with a look of utter despair.

During my childhood and early growth I had great respect but little affection for my father. I knew only the gloomy side of his character; it was that only which he exhibited in private life, for which he was so little fitted. But when I was old enough to go with him into society, I was surprised and delighted to find him a totally different being, whose existence I had not suspected. It seemed as if he were under some spell when at home; once outside the walls of our old chateau, his face would light up, his chest would expand, and he was young again. "Come, Maximilian," he would say, "now for a gallop!"

And he would dash gayly forward, with joyous shouts.

His boyish enthusiasm, his witty fancies, charmed my young heart, and I often wished to be able to carry a portion of our happiness to my poor mother, forgotten in her chamber corner.

The love I began to feel for my father became most enthusiastic admiration, when I saw him in the gay world, whether hunting, driving, at balls, or dinner parties, his finished elegance and polished wit made him shine on all occasions.

An admirable horseman, a skillful player, a brilliant talker, courageous and open-handed, I looked upon him as a perfect type of manly grace and chivalry. He called himself with a bitter smile, "the last gentleman." Such was my father in society; at our own fireside, my mother and I his sole companions, he was a restless, stern, and passionate old man.

The transports of anger that my father displayed towards one so gentle and delicate as my mother, would have shocked me, had they not been followed by redoubled tenderness, and the affectionate attentions of which I have already spoken. Justified in my eyes by these tokens of repentance, my father seemed to me a man whose natural good-temper was exasperated by an obstinate and systematic opposition to his tastes and prejudices. I believed my mother afflicted with some nervous disease; my father had in-



"IT IS YOU," EXCLAIMED MILE. MARGUERITE, WITH VEHEMENCE, "YOU WHO HAVE BRIBED THIS MAN—OR CHILD—TO IMPRISON US IN THIS TOWER."



timated as much to me, though with a reserve which I respected.

I could not so clearly define to myself the sentiment with which my mother regarded my father. She would gaze on him with an expression of severity and reproach, but an instant afterward her beautiful eyes would moisten, her sweet face would wear a look of the tenderest devotion.

My mother was married at fifteen, and I was in my twenty-second year when my sister, my poor Helen, was born. One morning a short time after her birth, my father came to me from my mother's sick room with an anxious countenance and beckoned me to follow him into the garden. After taking two or three turns up and down in silence, he stopped suddenly and addressed me:

"Maximilian! your mother grows more and more peculiar!"

"She is a great sufferer, dear father."

"Yes, doubtless, but she has now taken a strange whim; she wishes you to commence the study of law."

"Study law! How can my mother wish me, with my birth and position, to go to school again! That would be ridiculous."

"I agree with you," said my father, coldly; but your mother is ill, that is all."

I was a coxcomb, proud of my name, of my importance, and my success in society, but I adored my mother, between whom and myself there existed the warmest sympathy, and I went at once to assure her of my compliance with her wishes. She thanked me with a sad smile, and made me kiss my sister who was sleeping in her lap.

We lived only half a league from Grenoble; I could therefore attend the Law School there without leaving home. My mother questioned me daily about my progress in my studies with such persevering and intense interest, that I was forced to ask myself if there was not something at the bottom of this extraordinary proposition more than the fancy of a sick, nervous woman; if possibly my father's aversion to all business matters had not caused some loss of fortune, or at least some confusion in our affairs, which my mother hoped I might repair through my legal knowledge and business habits. This suspicion daily grew stronger; I now recollected hearing my father lament bitterly the losses he sustained at the time of the revolution, but such complaints had ceased long ago; I thought them quite unjustifiable at the time, for our fortune seemed to me most ample. The old chateau in which we lived, near Grenoble, had descended from father to son, and was the boast of the country. My father and I often hunted the whole day, without quitting our own grounds. Our stables were very extensive and always filled with fine horses, of which my father was as proud as he was passionately fond. We had besides an elegant hotel in Paris on the Boulevard des Capucins, in which a suite of apartments were kept solely for our own use. Our table was always served with every delicacy, and nothing in our establishment gave the least indication of expediency even, much less of poverty.

Not long after this my mother's health began surely but almost imperceptibly to decline. Her character changed strangely; instead of her former angelic sweetness, she became bitter and aggressive; I could not leave the chateau without my absence being made the subject of some sarcastic and painful comment. My father, who was as little spared as myself, bore these attacks very patiently, but they had the effect of causing him to spend less time at home than formerly. He evidently felt the need of constant diversion, and he always desired me to accompany him. My love of pleasure, the ardor of my youth, and above all the weakness of my heart, made me yield to him a too ready compliance.

One day in September, 185—, my father and I went to see the races, which were to take place a short distance from the chateau. He had several horses entered to run on that day, and we went early in the morning and breakfasted on the course. Towards the middle of

the day I was met, as I galloped backward and forward on the turf to watch the race, by one of our servants, who said he had been seeking me for half an hour; that my father had already gone home, whither he desired me to follow him without delay. "What has happened? tell me in heaven's name!" said I.

"I believe madame is much worse," replied the man.

On hearing this, I rode homeward like one distracted.

When I reached the chateau I saw my sister playing by herself on the turf in the large court. She ran up to me as I dismounted from my horse, and as she kissed me, said with a mysterious but merry air:

"The Cure has come."

I hastened into the house, where, however, I could not perceive any unusual bustle or confusion, and ascended the staircase with all speed. As I entered the dressing-room communicating with my mother's chamber, the door opened softly and my father came out. His face was very pale and his lips trembled.

"Maximilian," said he, without raising his eyes, "your mother asks for you." I wished to question him, but he motioned me away, and approached a window as if to look out.

I entered my mother's room, and found her reclining on the sofa with her eyes closed, while one arm hung motionless by her side. Her face was very pale, but it had suddenly regained all the exquisite sweetness and delicate beauty of which her extreme suffering had lately deprived it. The Angel of Death already overshadowed her with his wings.

I fell on my knees beside her. She opened her eyes, and raising her head with great difficulty, fixed upon me a long, tender look. Then in a scarcely audible voice she breathed these broken words: "Poor child—I am leaving thee—but do not weep. Thou hast left me alone all this time; but I have been so unkind! We shall meet again, my son—we shall then understand each other. Remind thy father of what he promised me. Be thou strong in the battle of life, but pardon those who are weak." She sank back exhausted for a moment, then rousing herself with an effort, raised her finger and looking earnestly at me, said: "Thy sister!"

Her blue eyes closed; suddenly opening them, she threw her arms upward. I uttered a piercing cry, and my father rushed into the room, but only to clasp with choking sobs, her lifeless body to his bosom.

Several weeks later my father desired me, in obedience to the last wishes of her whom we so bitterly mourned, to set out on my travels. I quitted France and commenced the wandering life I have led up to this day. During a year's absence I often longed to return home, but my father had fixed the exact time of my travels, and I had been taught to regard his wishes.

His letters were affectionate, but brief, and had never expressed the least impatience for my return. I was therefore greatly alarmed to find, on disembarking at Marseilles, two months ago, several letters from my father, recalling me home with feverish haste.

It was a gloomy night in February, when I saw once more the massive walls of our old chateau. A bitter, freezing north wind blew at intervals, and flakes of sleeting snow fell upon the wet ground with a sad feeble sound like the dead leaves of autumn. On entering the courtyard, I saw a shadow against one of the windows of the large saloon, which had not been used for some months previous to my mother's death. I entered quickly; on seeing me, my father uttered a low exclamation, then clasped me to his breast, and I felt his heart beat violently.

"Thou art frozen, my poor child," said he, addressing me in the second person, contrary to his usual custom. "Warm thyself. This room is cold, but I prefer it to all the others; one can at least breathe here."

"How is your health, dear father?"

"Tolerable, as thou seest." And leaving me near the fire-place of this immense room,

which two or three wax candles barely lighted, he recommenced the walk which I had apparently interrupted.

This strange reception filled me with alarm, and I gazed anxiously at my father.

"Hast thou seen my horses?" said he suddenly, without checking his footsteps.

"Father!"

"Ah! true, thou hast but just arrived." After a pause he resumed, "Maximilian, I wish to speak to you."

"I am listening to you, father."

He seemed not to hear me, but paced up and down the room, repeating at intervals, "I wish to speak to you, my son."

At length, passing his hand over his head, he sighed heavily, and, seating himself abruptly, motioned me to a chair opposite. Then as if he wished to speak, but lacked the courage to do so, his eyes sought mine with an expression of anguish, humility, and supplication, which, in a man as proud as my father, touched me deeply. I could not but feel that whatever faults he had committed, the confession of which was so painful, he had fully expiated them. Suddenly his eyes lost all expression, he grasped my arm, rose from his seat, and then fell heavily forward on the carpet. He was dead.

The heart does not reason nor calculate; it divines. I now understood the whole: one moment had sufficed to reveal to me without a word of explanation, by an irresistible ray of light, this fatal truth, which a thousand incidents repeated under my eyes every day for twenty years, had not made me suspect.

I knew that we were ruined, that the storm would soon burst over my head. Well! I am certain that my father could not have been more bitterly wept had he left me, loaded with fortune's favors. To my deep sorrow was added a feeling of profound pity; I saw constantly before me that look of supplication and humiliation; I was in despair at not having been able to speak one word of consolation to that broken heart, and I cried wildly to him who could no longer hear, "I forgive you! I forgive you!"

As well as I could conjecture, my father promised my mother in their last sad interview to sell the greater part of his property, and to pay the enormous load of debt he had contracted, having spent much more than his income, for many years past, and to live on the remainder whatever it might be. My father had kept his promise so far as to sell the timber, and a portion of his landed estate; but only an inconsiderable debt was paid with the proceeds; once the possessor of so large a sum of ready money he could not resist the fatal temptations of the Bourse; his stock speculations proved disastrous, and thus his ruin was complete.

I have not yet sounded the depths of misery into which we are plunged. I fell ill the next week after my father's death, and recovered barely in time to leave our old hereditary chateau before a stranger, one of the creditors, took possession. Fortunately for me an old friend of my mother, a notary living at Paris, and who formerly had charge of our affairs, came forward and offered to undertake the task of liquidation. I placed the matter in his hands, giving him unconditional power to act, and I suppose his labors are ended to-day. As soon as I reached Paris yesterday, I went to see him, but he had gone into the country and will not return till to-morrow. Suspense is hard to bear; these two days have been long and weary. It would have astonished me to be told ten years ago that this old notary, whose formal and precise language amused my father and me so greatly, would be, one day, a sort of oracle from whom I was to learn my destiny.

I have tried to cherish no false hopes; I have calculated that when all the debts are paid there will remain a hundred and twenty, or a hundred and fifty thousand francs. It is impossible that out of a fortune of five millions of francs there will not be at least this small sum left. I will take ten thousand francs for



my portion and will go to seek my fortune in the United States, leaving the rest for my little sister.

I will write no longer to-night. But my sad occupation has restored my calmness somewhat, depressing as may have been the incidents I have recalled.

To labor is certainly a divine law, since labor brings contentment with it; yet man loves it not, and while each day he enjoys the good it brings, each day he goes to it with the same repugnance. There is some strange and mysterious contradiction in this, as if we felt at once that it is a penalty imposed on us while we acknowledged the divine and paternal character of the Judge.

#### Thursday.

On awaking this morning the servant handed me a letter from the old notary, M. Laubepin. It contained an invitation to dinner, when he would inform me of his progress in settling my affairs, and ended by begging my pardon for the liberty he took. This circumspection augurs ill for me.

In order to pass away the time till the hour fixed for dinner, I went to the convent where my sister is, and took her out for a walk. The child knows nothing of our misfortunes, our ruin. She has been indulging various costly whims in the course of the day. She has bought a large supply of gloves, of rose-colored paper, bon-bons for her friends, essences, and wonderful soaps, all very useful things, doubtless, but less essential than a good dinner!

At six o'clock I reached M. Laubepin's house in the Rue Cassetta. I do not know our old friend's age, but I do not remember him looking otherwise than he did to-day; tall, but slightly bent, his white hair carelessly brushed, a clear, piercing eye, looking out from under thick black eyebrows, and a physique both vigorous and refined. His dress is always the same; a black coat of some antique fashion, a professional white cravat, with an old family diamond pin in his bosom, are the external signs of a methodical, grave mind, and a lover of traditions. The old gentleman was awaiting me at the open door of his little parlor; with a low bow he took my hand lightly between two fingers and led me up to an old lady who was standing in front of the fireplace, and said gravely and emphatically: "The Marquis de Champcey d'Hauterive!" then turning toward me, in a humbler voice, said: "Madame Laubepin." There was a moment's embarrassed silence after we were seated. I had supposed he would at once open our business matters; seeing he delayed the communication, I concluded it must be still more disagreeable for me to hear than I had expected. This idea was confirmed by the compassionate glances of Madame Laubepin, while in the keen looks with which the notary regarded me, I thought I could detect a spice of malice. I now remembered hearing my father call the polite, respectful notary, a Jacobin at heart, and I inwardly accused him of gratifying his secret antipathy to the nobility by prolonging the torture of suspense of one of that hated class. This thought roused my pride of rank, and determining to hide my suffering under lightness of speech, I addressed M. Laubepin.

"Why did you leave your house in the Place des Petits Peres? I am surprised, Monsieur Laubepin. I could never have believed you would forsake the dear place!"

"It is an act of disloyalty unworthy of my age, Monsieur le Marquis, but when I gave up my profession, I thought it best to give up my office also," replied M. Laubepin.

"What! have you retired from active life?" I demanded.

"Yes, M. le Marquis; from all public and official business, but there are several honorable and influential families whose confidence I have had the honor to obtain during a practice of forty-five years, who will seek my advice in

all delicate and private matters, and, I may add, they seldom regret following it."

As M. Laubepin finished rendering himself this just praise an old servant announced the dinner. I had the honor of conducting Madame Laubepin to the table. The conversation during dinner was upon the most trivial topics, but M. Laubepin frequently looked at me with the same equivocal expression, and whenever Madame Laubepin addressed me, it was in the sorrowful, pitying tone so often used in a sick-room.

At length we rose from table, and the old notary led the way into his study, where coffee was soon served.

He begged me to be seated, and leaning against the mantle-piece, addressed me thus:

"You have done me the honor, M. le Marquis, to charge me with the labor of liquidating the estate of your father, the late Marquis de Champcey d'Hauterive. I was about to write to you yesterday, when I heard of your arrival in Paris. Permit me now to state to you the result of my investigations."

"I perceive, sir, you have bad news to tell me."

"Yes, Monsieur le Marquis, and you will need to summon all your courage to hear it, but I must proceed methodically. In the year 1820, Mlle. Louise Helen Dugald Delatouche d'Eronville was sought in marriage by Charles Christian Odier, Marquis de Champcey d'Hauterive. Intrusted as I had been for years with the management of the affairs of the Dugald Delatouche family, and long since admitted to the confidence of the young heiress on a footing of respectful familiarity, I used every argument in my power to oppose her affection for the Marquis, and to prevent the sad alliance. I say sad alliance, not because the fortune of M. de Champcey was not equal to that of Mlle. Delatouche in spite of several mortgages with which it was already burdened; but I knew the character, the hereditary temperament, so to speak, of M. de Champcey. Beneath the chivalrous and attractive bearing which distinguished him as well as all others of his house, I clearly perceived his unreflecting obstinacy, his incurable frivolity, his passionate love of pleasure, and finally his supreme egotism."

"Sir!" said I, suddenly interrupting him, "the memory of my father is sacred to me, and must be respected by those who speak of him in my presence."

"I respect this sentiment in you, Monsieur le Marquis," replied the notary with sudden emotion, "but in speaking of your father, I cannot forget that I speak of the man who killed your mother, that heroic woman, that saint, that angel!"

I rose from my seat in great agitation. M. Laubepin, who had taken several steps across the room, caught my arm. "Pardon me, young man," said he, "I loved your mother, I have wept for her! I pray you to pardon me." And again placing himself before the fire, he resumed, in his ordinary solemn tone, "I had the honor and the chagrin to draw up your mother's marriage contract. Contrary to my earnest prayers, there was no marriage settlement, and it was with great difficulty that I was permitted to introduce into the instrument a protecting clause declaring one-third of your mother's real estate inalienable without her legally expressed consent. Vain precaution, Monsieur le Marquis, and I might say, cruel precaution of a badly inspired friendship, which, instead of proving a means of protection, only prepared for her the keenest torments! I mean those struggles, those violent disputes, the sounds of which must have reached your ears more than once, and in which your unfortunate mother lost, piece by piece, the last of her patrimony and her children's bread!"

"Sir! I beg of you"—

"I obey, Monsieur le Marquis—I will speak only of the present."

"To take such a step, sir, would be to outrage my father's memory, and I refuse."

M. Laubepin, after giving me one of his in-

quisitive glances, resumed: "You are aware that in default of making use of this legal right, you will remain liable for the debts of the estate, even when these exceed the value of property. Now I have the painful duty of telling you, Monsieur le Marquis, that this is precisely the case in the present instance. As you will see on examining this bundle of papers, it is perfectly certain, that after the sale of your hotel, on better terms than we can reasonably hope for, you and your sister will remain indebted to your father's creditors in the sum of forty-five thousand francs."

I was literally thunderstruck by this statement, which exceeded my worst apprehensions. For a moment, I neither saw the clock on which my vacant eyes were fixed, nor heard its ticking.

"Now," said M. Laubepin, after a short silence, "I must inform you that your mother, foreseeing the possibility of that which has now taken place, deposited with me some jewels, the value of which is estimated at about fifty thousand francs. In order to prevent this small sum, your only resource in the future, from falling into the hands of the creditors, you must employ the legal subterfuge of which I have already spoken."

"But that is out of the question, sir. I am only too happy to be able, with this unlooked-for means, to pay my father's debts in full, and I beg you to use it for that purpose."

M. Laubepin bowed slightly. "As you please," said he, "but I cannot refrain from observing to you that when the trust now in my hands has been thus applied, there will only remain, as the whole fortune of Mlle. Helen and yourself, the sum of between four and five thousand livres, which, at the usual rate of interest, will give you a yearly income of two hundred and twenty-five francs. This being settled, will you permit me, Monsieur le Marquis, as a respectful and confidential friend, to ask if you have any means of gaining a livelihood for your sister and yourself, and what are your plans?"

"I have no plans, sir. Those which I had formed are irreconcilable with the absolute poverty to which I am reduced. If I were alone in the world, I should enlist in the army; but I cannot forsake my sister, nor allow her to want. She is now very happy in the convent, and is young enough to remain there some years longer. I would engage, with all my heart, in any occupation which would allow me, by practising the closest economy, to pay my sister's expenses at the convent and to lay up something each year for her dowry."

M. Laubepin looked at me steadily. "In order to attain this desirable and honorable end," said he, "you must not think, Monsieur le Marquis, of entering the slow path of political life or seeking an office under government. You ought to have employment which will give you from the first an income of five or six thousand francs a year. I need not tell you that in our present social state, something else is necessary to gain this desideratum than merely to stretch out one's hand! Happily, I have some propositions to lay before you that may, at once, and without any great effort on your part, better your position." Then, fixing his eyes on me with a more penetrating look than ever, he continued: "In the first place, Monsieur le Marquis, a rich speculator has conceived the idea of a grand enterprise, the nature of which shall be explained to you subsequently, which cannot succeed without the special concurrence of the aristocracy. He thinks that a name as ancient and illustrious as yours figuring among those of the promoters of the enterprise will gain it a favorable reception among that class of the public to which the prospectus will be specially addressed. As a premium for this use of your name, he offers you one-tenth of the stock, the value of which is estimated from the first at ten thousand francs, and would probably be tripled by the success of the operation. Besides"—

"Enough, sir; such disgraceful proposals are not worth the trouble of stating them."



A ray of light shot from the eye of the old man, and a slight smile was visible on his dried and wrinkled face.

"If the proposition displeases you, Monsieur le Marquis, it displeases me no less; at the same time it was my duty to submit it to you. I have another which will perhaps make you smile, but which is much more suitable. One of my oldest clients is a merchant who retired from business a short time ago, and who lives in great comfort with an only and beloved daughter. His annual income cannot be less than twenty-five thousand livres. This young lady chanced to hear of your misfortunes three days ago; she is pretty, and is, besides, a most estimable person; I believe, nay, I have been assured, that she would not hesitate one moment to accept your hand and the title of the Marchioness of Champcey. The father consents, and I wait only one word from you, Monsieur le Marquis, to tell you the name and residence of this interesting family."

"Sir, this decides me; from to-morrow I will lay aside a title which in my situation is only a mockery, and which, moreover, seems to expose me to the most miserable intrigues. My family name is Odier; henceforth I will bear no other. Now, sir, while I recognize and thank you for the warm interest in me which could alone have induced you to listen to such proposals as you have laid before me, I beg you to spare me all others of a like character."

"In that case, Monsieur le Marquis," replied Laubepin, "I have no other proposals to make to you."

Then, as if seized with a sudden fit of merriment, he rubbed his hands together, making a sound like tearing parchment, and laughed, as he said: "You will be a difficult man to deal with, Monsieur Maximilian! Ah!—ah! very difficult indeed! It is very extraordinary, monsieur, that I did not observe sooner the striking resemblance you bear to your mother. The eyes and the smile in particular—but we must not wander from our subject. Since you choose to gain your livelihood by honorable labor, allow me to ask what your abilities are, and what you are fitted for?"

"My education has naturally been that of a man destined to wealth and ease. I have studied law, however, and have even been admitted to the bar."

"A lawyer? The devil! You a lawyer! But being admitted to the bar is not enough; in a legal career, more than in any other, it is necessary to prove one's self a man. Let us see—are you a fluent speaker, Monsieur le Marquis?"

"So far from it, I believe myself wholly incapable of extemporizing two sentences in public!"

"Hum! then your vocation is not precisely that of an advocate. You must turn in some other direction, but the subject demands reflection. I see, besides, that you are fatigued, Monsieur le Marquis. Here are your papers, which I beg you to examine at your leisure. I have the honor to wish you good-night. Allow me to light you to the door. But—pardon me—shall I wait further orders from you before selling the jewels in my possession, and applying the money to the payment of your creditors?"

"No, certainly not; I expect, moreover, that you will take out of the sum thus realized a just remuneration for your valuable services."

We had reached the staircase landing. M. Laubepin, whose figure is slightly bent when he walks, straightened himself quickly: "In what concerns your creditors, Monsieur le Marquis, I will respectfully obey you, but for myself—I was your mother's friend, and I beg humbly, but earnestly, that her son will treat me as a friend also." I gave the old man my hand, he pressed it warmly, and we parted.

I have returned to the little room I occupy at the top of this hotel, which no longer belongs to me. In order to prove to myself that the complete destruction of all my hopes has not plunged me into a state of despair un-

worthy of a man, I have written this account of the day, carefully preserving the exact phraseology of the old notary; notwithstanding my grief at the situation in which I find myself, the mingling of bluntness and courtesy, of mistrust and tenderness, displayed in his language, has often made me smile as I wrote.

Here is poverty, not that secret, proud, poetic poverty that led me, in imagination, across forests, deserts and prairies, but positive misery, want, dependence, humiliation, and what is worse yet, the bitter poverty of decayed wealth—poverty in a black dress, whose wearer hides his bare hands from his old friends, who pass by without seeing him! But I will take courage!

Monday, April 27.

I have waited in vain for five days for news from M. Laubepin. I confess that I placed great reliance on the interest he seemed to manifest in me. His experience, his practical knowledge, and his extensive business acquaintance, gave him the power of being very useful to me, and I was ready to take any steps he might advise; but left to myself, I know not which way to turn. I thought him one of those who perform much more than they promise, but I fear I was mistaken. I went to his house this morning under the pretext of returning the papers he had given me, having verified their unfortunate correctness. The servant told me M. Laubepin had gone to recruit his health at some country place in the lower part of Brittany, and would be absent two or three days longer. I was deeply annoyed by this intelligence. I not only felt wounded by meeting indifference and neglect, where I looked for warmth and devoted friendship, but I had the grief of returning with my purse as empty as I went. I had intended to ask M. Laubepin to advance me a small sum out of the few thousand francs that would remain after the payment of my father's debts; for though I had lived like a hermit since coming to Paris, I had exhausted the trifling sum remaining after my travels, and so entirely was it spent, that after breakfasting this morning like a shepherd, *casteneæ molles et pressi copia lactis*, I had recourse to a sort of sponging in order to dine, the melancholy remembrance of which I will preserve here in my journal.

The less one has breakfasted, the more one wants his dinner! This is an axiom of which I felt the full force to-day, long before the sun had set. Among those who were drawn by the beauty of the day into the gardens of the Tuilleries this afternoon, there might have been remarked a man, still young and perfectly well dressed, who seemed to observe the first smiles of spring, the re-awakening of nature, with extraordinary solicitude. Not content with observing with the eye alone, this person might frequently have been seen to break off stealthily the tender young shoots, the half-opened leaves, and carry them to his mouth with the curiosity of a botanist. This sort of food, suggested by reading the history of shipwrecked persons, was of very little value, however, as a resource against hunger, but my stock of knowledge was enriched by several interesting facts; I shall know in future that the foliage of the chestnut is excessively bitter; that of the rose-bush is not bad; that of the linden is oily and quite agreeable, and that of the lilac is, I believe, positively unwholesome.

I meditated on these discoveries as I walked to the convent to see my sister. On entering the parlor, I found it as full as a beehive, and felt more deafened than usual by the confused buzzing of the young bees. Helen soon came in, but with her hair in disorder, her eyes red and sparkling, and her cheeks inflamed. She held in her hand a piece of bread as long as her arm. As she kissed me with an abstracted air, I said:

"What is the matter, my dear? You have been weeping!"

"Oh! no, Maximilian, it is nothing."

"But what has happened? Tell me."

She lowered her voice, saying:

"I am very unhappy, dear Maximilian."

"Indeed! Tell me all about it while eating your bread."

"Oh! I shall not eat my bread; I am too unhappy to eat. You know Lucy—Lucy Campbell, my best friend? Well, we have quarreled terribly."

"Ah! that is sad!—But do not grieve, my darling, you will make friends again."

"That is impossible, Maximilian. Our quarrel was too serious to allow us to do that. It began with a trifle, but we got into a passion, and said very ill-natured things. You see, we were playing battledoor and shuttlecock, and Lucy made a mistake in counting the strokes. I had made six hundred and eighty, and Lucy only six hundred and fifteen, and she pretended she had made six hundred and seventy-five. That was a little too bad, you must allow. Well, I said my count was right, and she said hers was right. 'Very well, miss,' said I, 'let us ask the young ladies who were looking at us.' 'No,' she answered, 'I know I am right, and you are a bad player.' 'Well,' said I, 'you are a storyteller.' 'As to you, miss,' answered Lucy, 'I despise you too much to answer you.' Sister Sainte-Felix came up to us at that moment, luckily, or I think I should have beaten Lucy. Now, you see, after such a quarrel, we can never make friends; it would be disgraceful. But I cannot tell you how sorry I am; I do not believe there is anybody in the world who is so unhappy as I am."

"Certainly, my child, it would be hard to imagine a worse grief than yours, but I cannot help thinking you brought it upon yourself; the offensive words came from your mouth. Is your friend Lucy in the parlor?"

"Yes, there she is, in that further corner." And by a dignified motion of her head, Helen directed me to a little fair-haired girl, with cheeks as red and eyes as swollen as her own, who was evidently giving an old lady a history of the quarrel which Sister Sainte-Felix had so fortunately interrupted, and occasionally casting a stealthy glance at Helen and me as she spoke.

"Well! my dear child," said I, "have you confidence in me?"

"Oh yes Maximilian, I have great confidence in you."

"Then I will tell you what you must do; you must go very softly behind Miss Lucy's chair, and take her head between your hands, and kiss her tenderly on both cheeks, and then you will see what she will do in her turn."

Helen hesitated a little, then went across the room quickly and threw her arms round Lucy's neck, taking her quite by surprise; her embrace was warmly returned, and the two children wept together, surrounded by a group of sympathizing playmates, while the lady-like-looking Mrs. Campbell blew her nose with a noise like the bagpipes!

Helen returned to me with a face radiant with happiness. "Well, my darling," said I to her, "I hope you can eat your bread now."

"Oh, no, Maximilian, I have cried too much, and besides, I must tell you that a new pupil came to-day, and she gave us a treat of meringues and chocolate, so that I am not at all hungry. But I do not know what to do with the bread; I was so full of trouble that I forgot to put it back into the basket, as we were told to do if we are not hungry, and I am afraid I shall be punished. I think that as we go through the yard I shall throw it into the cellar window when no one is looking at me."

"What! my dear sister," and I blushed as I spoke, "you would throw away your bread?"

"I know it is not right, for perhaps there are poor people who would be glad to have it; are there not Maximilian?"

"Certainly there are, my child."

"But how can I give it to them? Poor people never come in here."



"See, Helen, give me the bread, and I will give it in your name to the first poor man whom I meet; will that do?"

"O yes, indeed."

The bell rang for visitors to depart. I broke the bread in two pieces, and put it into the pockets of my paletot.

"Dear Maximilian," said the child, "come again soon, and tell me if you met a poor man, if you gave him my bread, and if he thought it good."

Yes, Helen, I found a poor man, and gave him your bread, and he carried it as a precious booty to his lonely garret, and he thought it good; but it was a poor man without courage or resolution, for he wept as he devoured the alms bestowed by your beloved little hands, I will tell you all, Helen, for it is well you should know there are greater sorrows in the world than your childish troubles; I will tell you all except the name of the poor man.

Friday, April 28.

I WENT this morning at nine o'clock to M. Laubepin's, in the vague hope that he had returned, but he was not expected till to-morrow. The thought then suggested itself of seeing Madam Laubepin and telling her to what straits I was reduced by her husband's absence; but while I hesitated between pride and need, the old servant, frightened apparently by the famished look I fixed upon her, decided the question by shutting the door rudely in my face. I then resolved I would fast till to-morrow. I said to myself that after all one would not die because of a day's abstinence; if I acted wrongly through an excess of pride, I alone should suffer, and consequently it concerned nobody but myself.

I next went to the Sorbonne, where I had attended several successive courses of lectures, hoping to forget my physical wants in mental enjoyment; but the hour came when this resource failed, though not until I had begun to find it very insufficient. I also felt great nervous irritation, which I hoped to quiet by walking. The day was cold and misty. As I crossed the bridge of Saints-Peres, I stopped an instant almost in spite of myself; I leaned my elbows on the parapet, and watched the muddy waters of the river flow beneath the arches; I know not what accursed thoughts crossed my weak and weary mind; I saw under the most insupportable colors the future of continual struggle, of dependence and humiliation into which I had entered by the door of hunger. I felt an utter disgust for life, and that to live was to me an impossibility! At the same instant, my heated blood rushed to my brain, my sight grew dim, and as I bent downward over the bridge, the whole surface of the river seemed brilliant with sparks of fire.

I will not say according to the common forms of speech which I do not like: "It was not God's will that I should drown myself;" I will dare to say; "it was not my will!" God made us all free agents, and if I had ever doubted it, this moment, during which the soul and the body, courage and cowardice, good and evil, contended in mortal combat within me, would have silenced my doubts forever.

Once more master of myself, the water offered me no other temptation than the innocent one of quenching my burning thirst. But I reflected that I should find much purer water in my own room, and I walked toward the hotel with rapid steps, picturing to myself the delicious pleasure awaiting me there, and feeling astonished that I had not sooner thought of this expedient for satisfying my hunger. On my way thither I met Gaston de Vaux on the Boulevard, whom I had not seen for two years. He stopped, after a moment's hesitation, shook me cordially by the hand, asked me one or two questions about my travels, and quitted me hastily. Then retracing his steps, he said: "My friend, you must allow me to associate you with my good luck. I have gained a treasure within a few days; I have received a lot of cigars, each of which cost me two francs, but which are priceless. Here is one; you shall give me your opinion of it. Good-bye."

I reached my hotel, and mounting with difficulty my six flights of stairs, entered my room, and seizing my carafe, drank eagerly every drop of water it contained; after which I lighted my friend's cigar, and gave myself a smile of encouragement in my glass. I determined to go out again, feeling certain that exercise and the diversion of the streets were both salutary. On opening my chamber door I was surprised and displeased to see in the narrow passage the wife of the concierge of the hotel, who was very much embarrassed at my sudden appearance. This woman had been in my mother's service, and on her marrying, my mother, who was much attached to her, gave her the lucrative place she still held in the hotel. I had remarked for several days that she seemed to watch me closely, and had now almost caught her in the act. "What do you want?" said I, angrily.

"Nothing, Monsieur Maximilian, nothing," answered she, greatly agitated; "I came to prepare the gas." I shrugged my shoulders and came away. Night came. I could then walk in the most frequented places without fear of painful recognition. I was obliged to throw away my cigar, which made me sick. My promenade lasted two or three hours—cruelly long hours. There is something specially terrible in being a victim to hunger, that scourge of savage life, in the midst of all the abundance and pomp of civilization. It is as if a tiger were to spring at your throat in a crowded street in full day.

Hunger! It is not then an unmeaning word! It is a real evil, a positive malady; there are human beings who suffer ordinarily and almost daily what I suffer, by chance for the first time in my life. And to how many among them is not this suffering made keener by complications which I am spared? The only being whom I care about in the world I know is guarded from the suffering I endure; I see her dear face ruddy with health and happiness. But those who suffer not alone, who hear beloved lips ask in vain for food, those who see in their cold cheerless homes only pale faces, and children who know not how to smile! Oh, unhappy people! Oh, holy charity!

These reflections took away all idea of lamenting my own condition; they even gave me courage to bear the trial to the end. I could have shortened its duration. There are two or three restaurants where I am known, and where I did not scruple to enter when I was rich, although I had forgotten my purse. I could do so now; nor would it have been difficult for me to borrow a hundred sous in Paris, but these expedients which savor of want and trickery, are very repugnant to me. This inclination to borrow opens a slippery path for poor men, and I will not take the first step in it. I would as soon lose my sense of honesty itself as to lose the delicacy which is the crowning honor of this vulgar virtue. I have too often observed, with what terrible facility the exquisite sentiment of honesty is lost in the most gifted souls at the first breath of poverty, not to keep a strict watch over myself, not to reject as guilty those parleyings with conscience which seem most innocent. Fatigue and cold caused me to return at nine o'clock. The door of the hotel was open, and I reached the staircase with a light step, when I heard the sound on an animated conversation in the lodge of the concierge, of which I was apparently the subject, for at that moment the man pronounced my name with an accent of contempt.

"Be so good, Madame Vanberger," said he, "as to leave me in peace about your Maximilian. Is it I who ruined him? Well! what art thou talking about then? If he kills himself he will be buried—that is all?"

"I tell you, Vanberger," replied the woman, "It would have broken your heart to see him gulp down the water in his carafe—and if I believed you were in earnest in what you say—if he kills himself, he will be buried—but I do not believe it, because you are a really kind man, though you don't like to be disturbed. Think, Vanberger, of lacking both fire and food! A young man who has been fed all his

life with dainties, and reared as carefully as a pet cat! Is it not a shame and a disgrace, and is it not a queer government which permits such things?"

"But the government has nothing to do with it," said M. Vanberger, with reason; "and then you are mistaken, I tell you; it is not so; he cannot want bread—it is impossible!"

"Well! Vanberger, I will tell you all! I have followed him, I have watched him, I have made Edward watch him; I am sure that he did not dine yesterday, that he did not breakfast this morning, and, as I searched all his pockets and his drawers, and there is not a farthing in them, it is certain he has not dined to-day, for he is too proud to eat a dinner he cannot pay for."

"So much the worse for him! When one is poor, one should not be proud," replied the man, who seemed to me to express the sentiments of a porter.

I wished to hear no more of this dialogue, and ended it therefore by opening the lodge door, and demanding a light of M. Vanberger, who could not have been more alarmed if I had asked for his head. Notwithstanding my great desire to be resolute before these people, I could not help tottering and stumbling once or twice on the staircase. On entering my chamber, hitherto so icy cold, I was surprised and touched to find the temperature of the room soft and warm, and a clear fire burning. I was not so rigid and harsh as to extinguish it; I blessed the good hearts there are in the world; I seated myself in an old velvet arm-chair that had been moved like myself by the reverses of fortune from the drawing-room to the garret, and tried to sleep. I remained for half an hour in a sort of stupor, during which my dreams were of plentiful and sumptuous feasts, when I was roused by the opening of the door. I thought I was still dreaming when I saw Madame Vanberger enter, bearing a large tray, on which were two or three savory dishes, smoking hot. She had placed her tray on the floor, and was spreading a cloth on the table, before I could rouse entirely from my lethargy. I then rose quickly, saying, "What is this? What are you doing?"

Madame Vanberger pretended to be much surprised.

"Did not monsieur order a dinner?"

"Not at all. Edward has made some mistake; it must be another lodger."

"But there is no other lodger on the same floor with monsieur; I do not understand."

"At any rate it is not I. What do you wish to say? You trouble me! Carry it away."

The poor woman began to fold the table-cloth with a sad air, casting on me the imploring looks of a dog that has been whipped. "Monsieur has probably dined?" she resumed in a timid voice.

"Probably."

"It is a great pity, for the dinner was all ready; now it will be lost, and the little boy will be scolded by his father. If by any chance monsieur has not dined, monsieur would have greatly obliged me!"

I stamped my foot angrily. "Go away, go!" then as she went I approached her and said, "My good Louison, I understand you. I thank you, but I am not very well to-night, and I am not hungry."

"Ah! Monsieur Maximilian," she said, weeping, "if you knew how you mortify me! Well, you shall pay me for the dinner, if you wish; you shall put money into my hand when it returns to you—but you may be sure that if you were to give me a hundred thousand francs it would not cause me half as much pleasure as to see you eat my poor dinner! It would be bestowing a charity upon me! You who have a heart, Monsieur Maximilian, you ought to understand this."

"Well, my dear Louison, what do you want? I cannot give you a hundred thousand francs, but I will eat your dinner. You may leave me—will you not?"

"Yes, monsieur. Ah! thank you, monsieur; I thank you very much, monsieur. You have a good heart."



"And a good appetite also, Louison. Give me your hand; do not be afraid, I shall put no money in it. There—good-bye."

The excellent woman went out sobbing.

I had just finished writing these lines, after doing honor to Louison's dinner, when I heard the sound of a firm, heavy step; at the same time I could distinguish the voice of my humble providence speaking in an agitated but confident tone. A few minutes after, some one knocked at my door, and, as Louison moved aside, the solemn profile of the old notary appeared in the doorway as in a frame. M. Laubepin threw a rapid glance on the tray, where I had placed the remains of my repast; then advancing toward me and opening his arms with a gesture at once of reproach and confusion: "Monsieur le Marquis," said he, "why in the name of heaven did you not come to me?" He interrupted himself, crossed the room several times with great strides—"Young man," he resumed, "it is wrong; you have wounded a friend, you have made an old man blush!" He was greatly moved. I looked at him, a little touched myself, not knowing how to answer him, when he drew me to him, pressing me to his breast, murmured in my ear: "My poor boy!" There was a moment's silence between us; then seating ourselves, M. Laubepin addressed me:

"Maximilian, are you still of the same mind as when I saw you last? Have you the courage to accept the humblest labor, the most modest employment, provided it be honorable, which, while assuring your own personal subsistence, will also preserve your sister from the griefs and dangers of poverty in the present and future?"

"Very certainly; such is my duty, and I am ready to do it."

"In that case, my friend, listen to me. I have just come from Brittany. There lives in that ancient province a wealthy family of the name of Laroque, whose entire confidence I have been honored with for many long years. This family is now represented by an old man and two women, who are equally unfitted by age and character for business affairs. They possess a considerable estate, the management of which has been for a long time entrusted to a steward, whom I took the liberty of considering a knave. The next day after our interview, Maximilian, I received the news of this person's death; I set out immediately for the chateau Laroque, and applied for the vacant situation for you. I placed great stress on your professional education, but more particularly on your moral qualities. According to your desire I have not spoken of your birth; you are, and will be known in the house only as Maximilian Odiot. You will live in a separate building, where your meals will be served when not agreeable to you to take a seat at the family table. Your salary is fixed at six thousand francs a year. Does it suit you?"

"It suits me marvelously well; and the foresight and delicacy of your friendship touches me deeply; but, to tell you the truth, I fear I shall be a little strange, a little new at my business."

"Reassure yourself on this point. My scruples, my friend, have preceded yours, and I have concealed nothing from those interested. 'Madame,' said I to my excellent friend, 'Madame Laroque, you need a steward for your estate, and I offer you one. He is far from possessing the capacity of his predecessor; he is not versed in the mysteries of leases and rents; he knows not the first word of the business that you will be pleased to confide to him; he has not the special knowledge, not the practice, not the experience, nothing of all that which he must know; but he has something that his predecessor lacked, that sixty years of practice did not give him, and that ten thousand years would not give him, moreover: he has, madame, honesty. Take him, you will oblige both me and him also.' Madame Laroque laughed, young man, at my style of recommending people; but, after all, it seemed a good style, since it succeeded."

The worthy old man then offered to give me some elementary and general ideas upon the nature of the business with which I was to be intrusted; he also gave me some documents relative to the interests of the Laroque family, which he had taken the trouble to collect and put in order for me.

"And when, my dear sir, ought I set out?"

"Why, really, my dear boy" (it was no longer "Monsieur le Marquis") "the sooner the better, for those people down there are not capable among them all of writing a receipt. My excellent friend Madame Laroque in particular, a woman otherwise in every way praiseworthy, is neglectful, careless and childish in business matters to a degree that can hardly be imagined. She is a Creole."

"Ah! she is a Creole," I repeated with some vivacity.

"Yes, young man, she is an old Creole," replied M. Laubepin, drily. "Her husband was a Breton, but these details will come in their own time. For to-morrow, Maximilian, have good courage. Ah! I forgot. Thursday morning before I set out, I did something which will not be disagreeable to you. You had among your creditors several knaves, whose dealings with your father had evidently been usurious; armed with legal thunderbolts, I have reduced their demands one-half, and have obtained receipts for payment in full. There remains to you definitively, a capital of five thousand francs. By adding to this sum the amount you can lay aside yearly out of your salary, we shall have in ten years a pretty dowry for Helen. Come to-morrow to breakfast with Master Laubepin, and we will settle everything. Good night, Maximilian; good night, my dear child."

"May God bless you, sir."

#### CHATEAU DE LAROQUE (D'ARZ), May 1.

I QUITTED Paris yesterday. My last interview with M. Laubepin was sad. I have promised a son's affection to the old man. Then I went to bid Helen farewell. In order to make her understand the necessity for my engaging in some employment it was impossible to avoid telling her a portion of the truth; I therefore spoke of some temporary embarrassment of fortune. The poor child comprehended more than I told her, I believe, for her large eyes wide open with astonishment, filled with tears, and she sprang up and clasped me round the neck.

At length I set out. The railroad carried me as far as Rennes, where I passed the night. This morning I took my seat in a diligence, which put me down, five or six hours later, at the village of Morbihan, a short distance from the Chateau de Laroque. I had traveled a dozen leagues this side of Rennes without forming a judgment of the reputation for picturesque scenery which the old Armorica enjoys in the world. A flat country, green and monotonous, with eternal apple-trees in eternal meadows, the ditches and wooded-slopes bounding the view on both sides of the road, or, at most, showing little corners of rural grace: blouses and glazed hats to elevate these "vulgar pictures"—all this caused me strongly to think that the old, poetic Brittany was only a pretentious and even pitiful sister of Lower Normandy. Weary of cheats and apple-trees, I had ceased for an hour to pay the least attention to the landscape, and had fallen into a doze when I was roused by the unusual pitching forward of our heavy vehicle; at the same time the pace of the horses slackened sensibly, and a noise of old iron, accompanied by a peculiar friction, announced to me that the conductor was putting the shoe on the wheel of the diligence. An old lady, who was seated near me, seized my arm with that lively sympathy which a community of danger gives birth to.

I put my head out of the door; we were descending, between two high banks, a steep declivity—the notion of some engineer who was too great a friend of the straight line.

With the wheels of the diligence half sliding, half rolling, we were not long in finding ourselves in a narrow, gloomy valley, at the bottom of which a little stream ran sadly and noiselessly among thick reeds; over these shaking banks hung some old trunks of trees, twisted together and covered with moss. The road crossed the stream on a bridge of a single arch, and ascended the opposite hill, then passed over a vast heath, arid and absolutely bare, which reached to the verge of the horizon in front of us by the side of the road and near the bridge stood a ruined house, the look of utter desolation of which struck the heart. A robust young man was cutting wood before the door; a black string fastened his long, light-yellow hair behind. He raised his head, and I was surprised at the strange character of his features, at the calm look of his blue eyes; he saluted me in an unknown language, with a sweet but uncultivated accent. A woman sat at the window of the cottage spinning; her head-dress and the cut of her garments reproduced with theatrical exactness a picture of the stone images one sees reposing on tombs. These people had not the appearance of peasants; they had to a high degree that easy, gracious, and dignified bearing that is known as *l'air distingue*. Their physiognomy wore that sad and dreamy expression that I have often remarked with emotion among those people whose nationality is lost.

I got out of the diligence and walked up the hill. The heath extended all around me further than I could see; everywhere hungry rushes were tangled over a black earth; here and there were ravines, abandoned quarries, a few rocks breaking through the ground; not a single tree. But when I reached the plateau I saw on my right the dark line of the heath cut in the distance, a band of the horizon more distant yet, slightly indented, blue as the sea, flooded with sunlight, and which seemed to open in the midst of this desolate place the sudden perspective of some shining and fairy region: this was Brittany.

I had to hire a man in the little village of — to take me the two leagues yet remaining of my journey. During this long slow drive I have an indistinct remembrance of seeing pass under my eyes, woods, lakes, and oases of fresh verdure concealed in the valleys; but on approaching the Chateau de Laroque, I was filled with a thousand painful thoughts which left little place for the impressions of the tourist.

A few moments later and I should enter an unknown family on a footing of a sort of disguised servitude, with a title which would hardly secure me the consideration and respect of the menials of the house; this was new for me. At the moment when M. Laubepin proposed to me this situation of steward, all my instincts, all my habits rose in rebellion against the character of dependence particularly attached to such an office. I believed, however, that I could not refuse it without inflicting a wound and discouraging the eager efforts of my old friend in my favor. Besides, I could not hope to obtain for several years in a more independent position the advantages which this offered me from the beginning, and which permitted me to work at once for my sister's future benefit. I therefore subdued my repugnance, my prejudices; but they had been very keen, and they were reawakened with more strength when I was face to face with the reality. I repeated to myself that there is no situation so humble that personal dignity cannot sustain itself, and even elevate the place. Then I marked out my plan of conduct toward the members of the Laroque family, promising myself to display a conscientious zeal for their interests, and a proper deference for their persons, equally removed from servility and rudeness. But I could not conceal from myself that this last part of my task, the most delicate without contradiction, would be simplified or complicated by the special nature of the characters and minds I was about to find myself in contact with.

M. Laubepin was obstinately reserved on



this point, though he acknowledged that my eagerness to gain information was perfectly reasonable. But at the moment of my departure, he put a confidential letter into my hands, recommending me to throw it into the fire, as soon as I was master of its contents. I took this letter from my portfolio, and studied its sibyllic words, which I will copy here exactly:

"CHATEAU DE LAROQUE (D'ARZ).

"List of persons who inhabit the above-named chateau.

"I. Monsieur Laroque (Louis Auguste), an octogenarian, head of the family and chief founder of its fortune, an old sailor, celebrated under the first empire as a licensed privateer; he acquired his wealth upon the sea by honest enterprises of different kinds; for a long time a resident of the colonies. Originally from Brittany, he returned to his native province thirty years ago, accompanied by his only son, the late Pierre-Antoine Laroque, husband of ———

"II. Madame Laroque (Josephine-Clara), daughter-in-law of the above-named; a Creole by birth, aged forty years; indolent and romantic in character, is fanciful; an excellent soul.

"III. Mlle. Laroque (Marguerite Louise), grand-daughter, daughter, and presumptive heiress of the before-named persons, aged twenty years; Creole and Bretonnese; has idle fancies; a fine mind.

"IV. Madame Aubry, a widow of Mr. Aubry, exchange broker, deceased in Belgium; a second cousin, received as an inmate of the house; sour and crabbed.

"V. Mlle. Helouin (Caroline Gabrielle), aged twenty-six; a former governess, now a companion; mind cultivated; character doubtful.

"Burn this."

This document has been very useful to me, notwithstanding its reserve, for it dissipated my horror of the unknown, the half of my fears. Besides, if there were, as M. Laubepin asserted, two beautiful characters in the Chateau de Laroque, it was certainly a greater portion than one had any right to hope for among its five inhabitants.

After two hours' traveling, the carriage stopped before the barred gate, flanked by two pavilions, which were occupied by a porter. I left my baggage there, and walked toward the chateau, carrying my little carpet-bag in one hand, and beheading with blows of my cane in the other hand the daisies which peeped through the turf. After walking several hundred yards between two rows of enormous chestnut trees, I found myself in a large, circular-shaped garden, which seemed to transform itself into a park at a little distance. I perceived on both right and left deep perspectives, open between dense thickets already green, bits of water glimmering under the trees, and white boats housed under rustic roofs. Before me rose the chateau, of considerable size, built in the elegant half-Italian style of the early days of Louis XIII. It was surrounded by a terrace which formed a kind of private garden in front, and was accessible by several broad, low steps. The stately and smiling aspect of this building really disappointed me, and this feeling did not diminish when on approaching the terrace I heard the sound of young and joyful voices above the tinkling of a more distant piano. I was decidedly entering a house of pleasure, instead of the old rigid castle I had chosen to imagine.

However, this was not a time for reflection; I slowly ascended the steps and found myself in front of a scene, which, under other circumstances, I should have admired. Half a dozen laughing young girls were twirling in couples on the turf of the parterre, while a piano, touched by a skillful hand, sent them through an open window the measures of an impetuous waltz. I had hardly time to see the animated faces of the dancers, their disordered hair, their large hats flapping upon their shoulders: my sudden apparition was saluted by a general shout, followed instantly by profound silence;

the dancing ceased, and the band, ranged in order for battle gravely waited for the stranger to pass. The stranger had stopped, not, however, without exhibiting a little embarrassment. Although my mind had not for a long time been directed to social pretensions, I confess that at that moment I should have sold my traveling-bag at a very low price. But it was necessary for me to act. As I advanced, hat in hand, toward the double staircase leading to the vestibule of the chateau, the music ceased, and there appeared first at the open window an enormous Newfoundland dog, which rested his leonine muzzle on the window-still between his two hairy paws; then an instant afterward a tall young girl presented herself; her slightly brown and earnest face was set in a frame, as it were, of thick, shining black hair. Her which eyes, were extraordinarily large, examined the scene passing outside with indifferent curiosity. "Ah, well? what is the matter?" said she, in a calm voice. I made her a low bow, and once more execrating my traveling-bag, hastened up the flight of steps.

A gray-haired servant dressed in black took my name. I was shown a few minutes later into a large drawing-room hung with yellow silk, where I recognized at once the young person whom I had seen at the window, and who was extremely beautiful. Near the bright fire a middle-aged lady, whose features showed her to be a Creole, sat in a large arm-chair, almost buried in its eider-down cushions of all sizes and shapes. A tripod of antique forms placed over a lighted *brasero*, stood at her side, and she frequently held it to her thin pale hands. By the side of Madame Laroque was seated a lady knitting; her morose and disagreeable countenance made me recognize her as unquestionably the second cousin, widow of the exchange broker, deceased in Belgium.

The first look which Madame Laroque gave me was stamped with surprise bordering on stupidity. She made me repeat my name.

"I beg pardon—monsieur!"

"Odiot, madame."

"Maximilian Odiot, the agent, the steward from M. Laubepin?"

"Yes, madame."

"Are you very sure?"

I could not help smiling. "Yes, madame, perfectly sure."

She cast a rapid glance on the exchange broker's widow, then on the young girl with the earnest face, as if to say "Only imagine it!" After which she fidgeted slightly among her cushions and resumed:

"Be so good as to be seated, Monsieur Odiot. I thank you very much for devoting your talents to our service. We are in great need of your assistance, I assure you, for it cannot be denied that we have the misfortune to be very rich."

Perceiving that her second cousin shrugged her shoulders at these words, she went on: "Yes, my dear Madame Aubry, I think so. In making me rich, God wished to try me. I was born positively for poverty, for privation, for devotion and sacrifice; but I have always been thwarted. For example, I should have loved to have an infirm husband. Well! Monsieur Laroque was a man of the most robust health. You see how my destiny has been and will be missed from one end of life to the other."

"That will do," said Madame Aubry harshly: "poverty would be a fine thing for you, who cannot deny yourself any refinement, any luxury."

"Allow me, dear madame," replied Madame Laroque, "I have no taste for useless sacrifices. If I were to condemn myself to endure the hardest privations, who or what would be benefited thereby? If I were to freeze from morning till night, would you be any happier?"

Madame Aubry made us understand by an expressive gesture that she should be no happier, but that she thought Madame Laroque's language prodigiously affected and ridiculous.

"After all," continued the latter, "happy or unhappy, it matters little. We are very rich,

Monsieur Odiot, and though I had little to do with the making of this fortune, it is my duty to preserve it for my daughter, although the poor child cares no more for it than I do myself—is it not so, Marguerite?"

At this question a feeble smile was visible on the disdainful lips of Mlle. Marguerite, and her eyebrows were slightly raised, after which this dignified and superb physiognomy regained its repose.

"Monsieur," said Madame Laroque, "you shall be shown the apartments that have been prepared for you at the express desire of M. Laubepin; but, previous to that, will you be so good as to visit my father-in-law, who will be glad to see you? Will you ring, my dear cousin? I hope, Monsieur Odiot, that you will do us the pleasure to dine with us to-day. Good morning."

I was confided to the care of a servant, who begged me to wait in a room adjoining that which I had just quitted till he had received his orders from M. Laroque. This man had left the door half open, and it was impossible not to hear these words, spoken by Madame Laroque, in the tone of ironical good-nature, evidently habitual to her; "Can any one understand Laubepin, who promised me an honest, sober, middle-aged man, and who sends me a young gentleman like that?"

Mlle. Marguerite murmured several words, which escaped me, to my regret, I confess, and to which her mother replied; I do not contradict you, my daughter; but that does not render it any less ridiculous on Laubepin's part. How can you suppose that such a gentleman will go trotting in wooden shoes over the ploughed fields? I wager that man never put on wooden shoes; he does not even know what they are. Well! it is perhaps one of my faults, but I cannot imagine a good steward without wooden shoes. Tell me, Marguerite, now I think of it, if you will conduct him to your grandfather?"

Mlle. Marguerite came immediately into the room where I was. On seeing me, she seemed scarcely pleased. "I beg pardon, mademoiselle; but the servant desired me to wait here for him."

"Be so good as to follow me, monsieur."

I followed her. She led me up a staircase, through several corridors, and showed me into a gallery, where she left me. I began to examine the pictures suspended on the walls. These were mostly inferior sea-pieces devoted to the glory of the old privateers of the Empire. There were several pictures of sea-fights, a little smoked, in which it was evident that the little brig *Amiable*, Captain Laroque, twenty-six guns, had caused John Bull serious disasters. Then came full length portraits of Captain Laroque, which naturally attracted my special attention. They all represented, with some slight variations, a man of gigantic size, wearing a sort of republican uniform, with large facings, long-haired, like Kleber, and sending right before him an energetic fiery look; on the whole, a man who had little that was pleasing about him. As I was studying curiously this figure, which realized wonderfully the general idea of a privateer, and even of a pirate, Mlle. Marguerite came and begged me to enter another room. I there found myself in the presence of a thin, decrepit old man, whose eyes hardly preserved the vital spark, and who, to welcome me, touched with a tremulous hand the black silk cap which covered his bald head, as shining as ivory.

"Grandfather," said Mlle. Marguerite, raising her voice, "this is Monsieur Odiot."

The poor old captain raised himself a little in his arm-chair, as he looked at me with a dull, uncertain expression. I seated myself at a sign from Mlle. Marguerite, who repeated: "M. Odiot, the new steward, grandfather."

"Ah! good-day, sir," murmured the old man. A most painful silence followed. Captain Laroque continued to watch me with his bleared eyes as he sat bent double, and his head hanging down. At length, seeming to recollect an interesting subject of conversation, he said



to me in a deep, hollow voice, "M. de Beauchene is dead!"

I could make no answer to this unexpected communication; I was ignorant who this M. de Beauchene could be, and as Mlle. Marguerite did not give herself the trouble to explain to me, I could only express by some feeble exclamation of condolence the share I took in this sad event. This was not apparently to the taste of the old sailor, for he repeated the moment after, in the same lugubrious tone: "M. de Beauchene is dead!"

My embarrassment was redoubled by this persistency. I saw Mlle. Marguerite's foot beat the floor with impatience; I was in despair, and unluckily expressed the first thought which came into my mind: "Ah! and of what did he die!"

This question had scarcely escaped my lips when an angry glance from Mlle. Marguerite warned me that I was suspected of I not know what irreverent raillery. Feeling I had been guilty of a silly blunder, I was anxious to give the interview a happier turn. I spoke of the pictures in the gallery, of the emotions they must recall to the captain, of the respectful interests I felt in seeing the hero of such glorious deeds. I even entered into details, and instanced two or three combats in which the brig *Amiable* seemed to me to have really accomplished miracles. Though I was giving such a proof of courtesy and good taste, Mlle. Marguerite, to my extreme surprise, continued to look at me with manifest discontent and vexation. Her grandfather, however, listened attentively, raising his head little by little. A strange smile lighted up his thin face, and seemed to efface the wrinkles. Suddenly placing his hands on the arms of his chair, he rose to his full height; a warlike flame shot from his deep-sunk eyes, and he cried in a loud voice that made me tremble: "Up with the helm! To windward! Fire the larboard guns! Come alongside! Throw the grappling irons! Quick! We hold him! Fire high! Sweep his deck! Now! together! Fall upon the English, the cursed Saxon! Hurrah!" In uttering this last shout, which rattled in his throat, the old man, vainly supported by the pious hands of his granddaughter, fell as if crushed into his arm-chair. Mlle. Laroque made me an imperious sign, and I left the room. I found my way back as well as I could, through the maze of passages and staircases, felicitating myself warmly on the wit and discretion I had displayed in my interview with the old captain of the *Amiable*.

The gray-haired servant who received me on my arrival, and whose name was Alain, I found waiting for me in the vestibule to tell me from Madame Leroque that I had no time to visit my apartments to dress before dinner—that I was very well as I was. At the moment when I entered the saloon, some twenty persons were about leaving it, with the usual ceremony, to go to the dining-room. It was the first time since the change in my condition, that I had mingled in society. Accustomed to the preference which etiquette accords in general to birth and fortune, I did not receive without a bitter feeling this first indication of the neglect and disdain to which my new situation inevitably condemns me. Repressing as I best could the mutinous feeling, I offered my arm to a young girl, short, but well-formed and graceful, who was, as I supposed her to be, Mlle. Helouin, the governess. My place at table was near hers. As the company were seating themselves, Mlle. Marguerite appeared, like *Antigone*, guiding the slow and dragging steps of her grandfather. She seated herself on my right, with that air of tranquil majesty which becomes her so well, and the powerful Newfoundland, seemingly the authorized guardian of this princess, was not long in posting himself as a sentinel. I expressed to my neighbor, without delay, the regret I felt at having so awkwardly evoked memories that agitated her grandfather in so sad a manner."

"It is I who ought to make excuses, monsieur," she answered, "I ought to have told you we must not speak of the English before

my grandfather. Are you familiar with Brittany?"

I replied that I had not seen the province before this day, but that I was very glad to become acquainted with it; and in order to prove that I was worthy of it, I spoke in a poetic strain of the picturesque and beautiful scenery I had passed through. I thought this adroit flattery would gain the good-will of the young Bretonnese, and I was astonished to see symptoms of impatience and annoyance in her face. I was decidedly unfortunate with this young girl.

"I see, monsieur," said she, with a singular expression of irony, "that you love that which is beautiful, which appeals to the imagination, to the soul; nature, verdure, stones, and the fine arts. You will succeed wonderfully with Mlle. Helouin, who adores these things, which, for my part, I do not love."

"But in heaven's name, then, what do you like, mademoiselle?"

At this question, which I addressed to her in a tone of amiable pleasantry, she turned abruptly toward me, gave me a haughty glance, and answered coldly, "I like my dog. Here! Mervyn."

Then she plunged her hand affectionately into the long hair of the Newfoundland as he stretched his formidable head between my plate and hers while standing on his hind legs.

I could not but observe with new interest the physiognomy of this singular person, and seek for the external signs of that barrenness of soul of which she boasted. Mlle. Laroque, who seemed to me very tall at first, owed this appearance to the ample and perfectly harmonious character of her beauty. She was in reality of ordinary size. Her face of a slightly rounded oval, and her neck exquisitely arched, and proudly set upon her shoulders, are lightly tinged with a dull golden color. Her black hair forms a striking relief to her forehead and throws wavy, bluish reflections at each movement of her head; the nostrils, delicate and thin, seemed copied from the divine model of the Roman Madonna, and sculptured in living mother of pearl. Beneath the large, deep, and pensive eyes, the tawny golden hue of the cheeks shades into a browner circle, which looks like a mark traced by the shadow of the eyelashes, or as if burned by the fiery radiation of her glances. It is difficult to describe the sovereign sweetness of the smile which comes occasionally to animate this beautiful face, and to temper, by a gracious contraction, the brilliancy of those large eyes. Truly, the goddess of poesy, of dreams, and of the enchanted realms, might confidently present herself for the worship of mortals under the form of this child, who loves only her dog. Nature, in her choicest productions, often prepares for us these cruel mystifications.

Moreover, to me it matters little. I feel that I am destined to play the part of a negro in Mlle. Marguerite's imagination—the object, as everyone knows, of slight attraction for a Creole. On my side, I flatter myself that I am as proud as Mlle. Marguerite; the most impossible of all attachments for me, would be that which would expose me to the suspicion of intrigue and fortune-hunting. I do not think, besides, that I shall need to arm myself with great moral strength against an improbable danger, for the beauty of Mlle. Laroque is of that order which challenges the pure contemplation of the artist, rather than a more human and tenderer sentiment.

On hearing the name of Mervyn, which Mlle. Marguerite has given to her body-guard, my left-hand neighbor, Mlle. Helouin, launched full sail into the time of Arthur, telling me that Mervyn was the authentic name of the celebrated enchanter, vulgarly called Merlin. From the Knights of the Round Table, she went back to the time of Caesar, and I saw defile before me in a somewhat tedious procession the whole hierarchy of druids, bards and ovates, after which we had a fatal tumble from menhir to dolmen and from galgal to cromlech.

While I wandered in Celtic forests, guarded

by Mlle. Helouin, who only needed to be a little fatter in order to make an excellent druidess, the exchange broker's widow, who sat near us, kept up an incessant complaining, "they had forgotten to give her a foot-stove; they had brought her cold soup; the meat which was served her was nothing but skin and bones; this was the way she was treated. But she was accustomed to it. It was sad to be poor, very sad. She wished she was dead."

"Yes, doctor," she continued, addressing her neighbors, who seemed to listen to her grievances with an affectation of interest mingled the least in the world with irony—"yes, doctor, it is not a jest; I wish I were dead. It would be a great relief to all the world. Think, doctor! When one has been in my position, when one has eaten off silver plate, marked with one's own crest—to be reduced to living on charity, and to see one's self the sport of servants! No one knows what I suffer in this house, no one ever will know. Those who have pride, suffer without complaining; it is for this reason that I hold my peace, doctor, but I think none the less."

"That's right, my dear lady," replied the doctor, whom they called Desmarests, I believe, "do not let us talk of it any more; drink some wine, that will calm you."

"Nothing, nothing will calm me but death!"

"Ah well! madame, whenever you please!" replied the doctor quietly.

Near the center of the table the attention of the guests were engrossed by the careless, satirical, and vainglorious sallies of a personage whom I heard addressed as M. de Bevallan, and who seemed to enjoy here the privileges of an intimate friend. He was a large man, of mature age, whose head belonged strictly to the type of Francis the First. They listened to him as to an oracle, and Madame Laroque herself granted him as much interest and admiration as she seemed capable of feeling for anything in the world. For myself, as the greater part of the witticisms related to local anecdotes and occurrences, I could not fully appreciate the merits of this Armorican lion.

I had, however, to acknowledge his politeness to me; he offered me a cigar after dinner, and showed me into the room appropriated to smoking. He did the honors, at the same time, to three or four young men just out of their teens, who evidently regarded him as a model of good manners and elegant wickedness.

"Eh! Bevallan," said one of these young fellows, "you do not, then, give up the priesthood of the sun?"

"Never," answered Bevallan; "I will wait ten months, ten years, if necessary; but I will have her or nobody shall."

"You are not in the meantime unhappy, old fellow; the governess will help you to be patient."

"Ought I to cut off your tongue or your ears, Arthur?" replied M. Bevallan in a low voice, advancing toward his interlocutor, and reminding him of my presence by a quick gesture.

They were then brought on the carpet, in charming confusion, all the horses, all the dogs, all the ladies of that part of the country. It is to be wished, by the way, that women could be secretly present for once in their lives at the conversations held between men after a good dinner; they would then understand exactly the delicacy of our customs, and the confidence we ought to inspire them with. I do not pride myself on my prudery, but the talk to which I was a listener had the serious fault, in my opinion, of exceeding the limits of the loosest jesting; it hit at everything by the way, outraged gayety, and finally took a character of universal profanation.

But my education, doubtless very incomplete, has left in my heart a fund of respect, which it seems to me ought to be preserved in the midst of the liveliest expansions of good humor. We have our Young America in France, however, which is not content if it does not utter blasphemy after dinner; we have amiable little vagabonds—the hope of the future—who have had neither fathers nor mothers, who have



no country, and no God, but who would seem to be the brutal production of some machine without heart or soul, which has deposited them accidentally on this globe to be indifferent ornaments to it.

In short, M. de Bevallan, who did not fear to constitute himself the cynical professor of these beardless rouses, did not please me, and I think I pleased him as little. I pretended to be fatigued, and took my leave.

At my request, old Alain equipped himself with a lantern, and guided me across the park to the building allotted to my use. After some minutes' walking, we crossed a stream on a wooden bridge, and found ourselves before a massive door surrounded by a kind of belfry and flanked by two turrets. This was formerly the entrance of the old chateau. Oak and fir trees formed a mysterious circle around this feudal ruin, which gave it an air of deep seclusion. This was to be my habitation; my three rooms, very suitably furnished with chintz, extended above the door from one turret to the other. This melancholy abode pleased me; it suited my fortune.

As soon as I was rid of old Alain, who was in a talkative humor, I seated myself to record the doings of this important day, stopping at intervals to listen to the soft murmur of the little river, flowing beneath my windows, and the cry of the legendary owl celebrating its sad love in the neighboring woods.

July 1.

It is time for me to try to disentangle the thread of my own interior existence, which has been lost sight of during the last two months, owing to my active engagements. The next morning after my arrival, after spending some hours in studying the books and papers of Father Hivart, as they call my predecessor, I went to breakfast at the chateau, where I found only a part of the guests of the previous evening.

Madame Laroque, who spent much of the time in Paris before the health of her father-in-law condemned her to a perpetual country life, faithfully preserves in her retreat the taste for the pleasures, elegant or frivolous, of which the Rue du Bac was the mirror in Madame de Stael's time. She appears, besides, to have visited most of the large cities of Europe, and has brought back literary tastes far exceeding the common extent of the knowledge and curiosity of Parisian ladies. She takes a number of journals and reviews, and endeavors as much as possible to follow from a distance the movements of the refined civilization of Paris, of which the theaters, the museums, and the new books are the flowers and the fruits, more or less ephemeral. During the breakfast, a new opera was spoken of, and Madame Laroque asked M. de Bevallan some questions respecting it which he was unable to answer, though he has always, if one may believe him, a stall at the Opera des Italiens. Madame Laroque then turned to me, but showed by her abstracted air the little hope she had of finding her man of business well-informed on such subjects; but these are, unfortunately, precisely the only ones with which I am acquainted. I had heard the opera when in Italy that was being played in France for the first time. The reserve of my answers roused her curiosity, and she began to press me with questions, and soon deigned to communicate her own impressions of her travels, her recollections and her enthusiastic enjoyment of them. In short, it was not long before we visited together in imagination the most celebrated theaters and galleries of the continent, and our conversation was so animated that, as we rose from the table, Madame Laroque took my arm unconsciously in order not to interrupt its course. Our sympathetic interchange of thought continued in the saloon, Madame Laroque forgetting more and more the benevolent, patronizing tone which had, to this time, greatly offended me.

She confessed that the inability to gratify her love for the theater troubled her greatly; and that she meditated having a comedy acted at the chateau. She also asked my advice in the arrangement of this amusement. I then told

her at length of the private stage arrangements I had seen in Paris and in St. Petersburg: then, not wishing to abuse my privileges, I rose, declaring that I must at once commence my duties by the examination of a large farm situated two leagues from the chateau. At this announcement Madame Laroque seemed filled with sudden consternation; she looked at me, fidgeted in her chair, held her hand over *brasero*, and at length said to me in a low voice: "Ah! what does that matter? Let it go"—and when I insisted, "why, *mon Dieu*," she replied, with a pleasant embarrassment, "the roads are frightful—wait at least till the fine weather comes."

"No, madame," said I, laughing, "I will not wait one minute; one is either a steward or one is not."

"Madame," said old Alain, who chanced to be there, "Father Hivart's wagon can be harnessed for Monsieur Odiot; it has no springs, but it is all the more substantial."

Madame Laroque cast a look of thunder at the unlucky Alain, who dared to propose Father Hivart's wagon to a steward of my sort, who had attended the theatrical performances at the palace of the Grand-Duchess Helen.

"Will not the carriage go in that road?" she asked.

"The carriage, madame? *Ma foi*, no. There is no doubt it would go, but it would not go whole," said Alain—"and yet I do not believe it would go at all."

I protested that I could go perfectly well on foot.

"No, no, that is impossible, I do not wish it! Let us see—we have a half a dozen saddle-horses who do nothing—but probably you do not ride on horseback?"

"I beg your pardon, madame—but it is really unnecessary, I can go."

"Alain, have a horse saddled for Monsieur Odiot—which one, Marguerite?"

"Give him Proserpine," muttered M. de Bevallan, laughing in his sleeve.

"No, no, not Proserpine," cried Mlle. Marguerite, quickly.

"Why not Proserpine, mademoiselle?" I then said.

"Because she will throw you," the young girl frankly answered.

"Oh, indeed? really? pardon me, if you will allow me to ask, mademoiselle, if you mount this beast?"

"Yes, monsieur, but I have great difficulty in doing so."

"Very well! perhaps you will have less when I have mounted her once or twice. That decides me. Have Proserpine saddled, Alain."

Mlle. Marguerite frowned and sat down, making a gesture with her hand, as if to throw off all responsibility for the catastrophe that she foresaw.

"If you need spurs, I have a pair at your service," said M. de Bevallan, who seemed to think I should never return.

Without seeming to remark the reproachful look Mlle. Marguerite gave the obliging gentleman, I accepted his spurs. Five minutes later the noise of unruly feet announced Proserpine's approach; she was led with difficulty to the foot of one of the flights of steps leading up to the private garden, and was, by the way, a very beautiful, half-blooded animal, black as jet. I descended the broad steps. Several young men, with M. de Bevallan at their head, followed me out upon the terrace, through feelings of humanity, doubtless, and at the same time, the three windows of the saloon were opened for the benefit of the ladies and elderly men. I would willingly have escaped all this preparation, but it was necessary to submit to it, and besides, I was not uneasy about the end of the adventure, for if I was a young steward, I was an old horseman. I could hardly walk when my father placed me on a horse, to my mother's extreme terror, and he had afterward spared no pains to render me his equal in an art in which he excelled. He had even carried my education in this respect to refinement, in making me sometimes wear the old and heavy family armor, in order to perfect me in vaulting.

However, Proserpine allowed me to gather up

the reins, and even to pat her chest, without the least sign of fear; but she no sooner felt my foot press on the stirrup than she sprang aside and gave three or four superb flings over the large marble vases which ornamented the steps; then she curbed herself down, pawing, beating the air with her fore feet, after which she stood quiet, trembling all over.

"Not easy to mount," said the groom, winking his eye.

"I see that, my lad, but I am going to astonish her—see."

At the same moment I leaped into the saddle without touching the stirrup, and while Proserpine reflected upon what had happened to her I had taken a firm seat. The instant after we disappeared at a gallop down the avenue of chestnuts, followed by the sound of clapping of hands, for which M. de Bevallan had had the kindness to give the signal.

This incident, insignificant as it was, did not fail, as I perceived that evening, to establish my reputation in their opinion. Several other accomplishments of equal worth have completely secured me all the importance I wish for here, that which will allow me to sustain my personal dignity. It can be seen, moreover, that I do not intend to abuse the kindness and respect of which I may be the object, in order to usurp in the chateau a position little in conformity with my humble duties. I shut myself up in my tower as often as I can without being wanting in politeness; I keep myself, in one word, strictly in my place, so that no one will ever be tempted to put me there.

Several days after my arrival I was present at one of those ceremonious dinners which, at this season, take place almost every day. During its progress I heard my name pronounced in a tone of interrogation by the fat under-prefect of the neighboring town, who was seated on the right of the mistress of the house. Madame Laroque, who is subject to fits of abstraction, forgot that I was near her, and whether I would or no, I heard every word of her answer:

"*Mon Dieu*—do not speak of it! There is some inconceivable mystery there—we think he is some disguised prince—he can describe his travels over the world by the hour together! He has every accomplishment; he rides, plays the piano, he draws, and all to perfection. Between ourselves, my dear under-prefect, I think he is a very poor steward, but a very agreeable man."

The under-prefect, who is also a very agreeable man, or who thinks he is one, which is quite as satisfactory to himself, replied gracefully, that there were beautiful eyes enough in the chateau to explain many mysteries; that, besides, Love was the legitimate father of Folly, and the natural steward of the Graces—then suddenly changing his tone: "However, madame," he added, "if you have the least uneasiness respecting him, I will have him interrogated to-morrow by the brigadier of the gendarmerie."

Madame Laroque protested against this excess of polite zeal, and the conversation regarding me proceeded no further; but it pleased me greatly, not against the under-prefect, who on the contrary pleased me infinitely, but against Madame Laroque, who, in rendering more than justice to my private qualities, was not sufficiently penetrated with a sense of my official merit.

It chanced that on the next day I had to renew the lease of a large farm. The tenant was a cunning old peasant, but I succeeded in dazzling him by some terms of jurisprudence adroitly mingled with the reserve of a skillful diplomatist. When our agreement was concluded, the good man placed on my desk three rolls of gold pieces. Though the meaning of this payment, which was not due, did not at once occur to me, I abstained from exhibiting any surprise; but I found by indirect questions that this sum constituted the earnest-money, customary on each renewal of the leases; or in other words the glass of wine which the farmers give the owners of the vineyards. I had not thought of claiming this earnest money, having found no mention of it



in the former leases, drawn up by my skillful predecessor, and which served me as models. I drew no conclusion from this circumstance, at the moment, but when I placed this pledge in Madame Laroque's hands, her surprise astonished me.

"What does this mean?" she asked me. It explained the nature of the gratuity. She made me repeat my explanation.

"Is it the custom?"

"Yes, madame, whenever a new lease is granted."

"But there have been during thirty years more than ten leases renewed to my knowledge—what is the reason we have never heard of these things before?"

"I do not know what to tell you, madame."

Madame Laroque fell into an abyss of reflection, at the bottom of which she met, perhaps, the venerable shade of Father Hivart, after which she shrugged her shoulders, slightly looked at me, then at the gold pieces, then again at me, and seemed to hesitate. Then she leaned back in her arm-chair, and sighing deeply, said to me with great simplicity:

"Very well, monsieur; I thank you."

This act of palpable honesty, which she had the good taste not to compliment me for, had the effect of impressing Madame Laroque with a great idea of her steward's ability and virtue. I discovered that some days afterwards. Her daughter was reading to her a history of a voyage to the North Pole, in which there was an account of an extraordinary bird which did not fly away:—"Hold," said she, "that is like my steward."

I firmly hope that I have since acquired, by the strict attention with which I have devoted myself to the task I have undertaken, some right to less negative praise.

When I went to Paris recently to visit my sister, M. Laubepin thanked me with great warmth for the honor I had done his recommendation of me.

"Courage, Maximilian," said he to me; "we will have a dowry for Helen. The poor child will not be, so to say, talk for nothing. And as to yourself, my friend, cherish no regret. Believe me, that which most resembles happiness in this world, you have within you; and thank Heaven, I see you will always have it; in that peace of conscience and healthy serenity of soul which follow devotion to duty."

The old man is doubtless right. I am tranquil, but I am hardly happy. There are in my soul, which is not yet mature enough for the austere enjoyment of sacrifice, alternate transports of gayety and despair. My life is unreservedly dedicated to another, feebler and dearer, and belongs to me no longer; it has no future, it is shut up in a cloister forever. My heart must beat, my head must think for another only. Let Helen be happy! Age draws near already for me! may it come quickly! its inciness will sustain my courage.

I ought not to complain, besides, of a situation which has beguiled my most painful apprehensions, and exceeded my best hopes. My duties, my frequent journeys into the neighboring departments, my taste for solitude, keep me often away from the chateau. I always avoid the noisy parties there, and perhaps it is in good part to the rarity of my presence that I owe the friendly welcome I always find. Madame Laroque, in particular, exhibits a real attachment to me; she makes me the confidant of her strange but very sincere mania, for poverty, for devotion, and poetic abnegation, which form an amusing contrast with her many precautions against her Creole chilliness. Sometimes she envies the gipsies burdened with children, who drag a miserable cart along the roads and cook their dinner under the shelter of the hedges; sometimes it is the sisters of charity, sometimes it is the camp women, whose heroic labors she is ambitious of emulating. Then she will reproach the late M. Laroque with his excellent health, which never permitted his wife to display her abilities as a sick nurse. And for several days she has wished to have added to her arm-chair a kind of niche, in the form of a turret, to shelter her from draughts of air, and I found her installed, the other

morning, in this kiosk, where she sweetly awaited martyrdom.

I have hardly less to praise in the other inhabitants of the chateau. Mlle. Marguerite, always plunged in some unknown reverie, like a Nubian sphinx, condescends, however, with obliging readiness, to sing my favorite airs. Her voice is an admirable contralto, and which she uses with the most consummate art, but at the same time with a coldness and indifference which must be intentional. It sometimes happens that an expression of warmth and passion escapes her lips, but she seems humiliated and ashamed of this forgetfulness of character, or part, and hastens to resume her icy propriety.

Several games at piquet, which I have had the politeness to lose with M. Laroque, have won the good-will of the poor old man, whose looks are sometimes fastened on me with an intentness truly remarkable. One would say that some dream of the past, some imaginary resemblance is half awakened in the shadows of that worn-out memory, through which float the confused images of a whole century. But no one has offered to repay me the money lost with him! It seems that Madame Aubry, who is the old captain's regular partner, does not scruple to accept the repayment of her losses, but this does not prevent her winning as often as she can, on which occasion the old sailor falls into a great rage with her.

This lady, whom M. Laubepin treated with great lenity when he characterized her simply as possessing a mean mind, inspires me with no sympathy. But I was constrained, through respect for the house, to gain her kindly regard, and think I have done so by listening to her miserable lamentations over her present condition, and her glowing descriptions of her former magnificence, her silver plate, her furniture, her laces, and her numberless pairs of gloves!

I must confess I am at a good school to learn to despise the fortune I have lost. All preach to me eloquently, by their attitude and language, on the vanity of riches; first Madame Aubry, who may be compared to those shameless gourmands whose revolting greediness takes away your appetite, and who give you a thorough disgust for the dishes which they recommend to you; next this old man, who is suffering with his millions as sadly as Job on his dung heap; then this woman, excellent but romantic and blase, who dreams, in the midst of unwelcome prosperity, of the forbidden fruit of poverty; and finally the superb Marguerite, who bears the diadem of beauty and opulence which heaven has placed upon her forehead, as if it were a crown of thorns.

Strange girl! Almost every morning, in fine weather, I see her pass under my belfry windows on horseback; she salutes me with a dignified bow which merely ruffles the black feather on her hat, then slowly disappears in the shady path which crosses the ruins of the old chateau. Ordinarily, old Alain follows her at a distance; sometimes she has no other attendant than the enormous and faithful Mervyn, who moves along at the side of his beautiful mistress, like a pensive bear. She goes in this style on errands of mercy, through all the neighboring country. She is her own protector; there is not a cottage within six leagues round, where she is not known and venerated as the fairy of benevolence. The peasants, when speaking of her, say simply: "Mademoiselle," as if they spoke of one of those royal ladies who make the charm of their legends, and whose power and beauty she seems to them to possess.

I often endeavor to explain to myself the shadow of somber preoccupation which is constantly visible in her face, the stately and defiant severity of her glance, and the bitter dryness of her conversation. I ask myself whether these are the natural traits of a mixed and capricious character, or the symptoms of some secret trouble, remorse, or fear, or love, which vexes this noble heart. However disinterested one may be in the case, it is impossible not to feel a certain curiosity respecting so remarkable a person. Last evening, Alain, with whom I am a favorite, served my solitary repast.

"Well, Alain," said I, "this has been a beautiful day. Have you been out to-day?"

"Yes, monsieur, this morning with mademoiselle."

"Ah! indeed."

"Did monsieur see us pass?"

"It is possible, Alain. Yes, I see you pass sometimes. You sit your horse well, Alain."

"Monsieur is very kind. Mademoiselle sits a horse much better than I."

"She is a very beautiful young girl."

"Oh! perfect, monsieur, and as good as beautiful; and so is madame, her mother. I will tell monsieur something. Monsieur knows that this property belonged formerly to the last Count of Castennac, whom I had the honor to serve. When the Laroque family bought the chateau, I acknowledged that my heart was full, and I disliked to remain in the family. I had been taught to have a great respect for the nobility, and it cost me a great deal to serve people without birth. Monsieur may have remarked that it gives me particular pleasure to do him any service, and it is because he has the air of a gentleman. Are you very sure you do not belong to the nobility?"

"I fear so, my poor Alain."

"Nevertheless, and it is this I was going to say to monsieur," replied Alain, with a graceful bow; "I have learned, while in the service of these ladies, that the nobility of feeling is worth much more than the other, and in particular than that of Count de Castennac, who used to beat his servants. It is a pity, monsieur, that mademoiselle could not marry a gentleman with a fine name. There would then be nothing more wanting to her perfection."

"But it seems to me, Alain, that it depends on no one but herself."

"If monsieur speaks of M. de Bevallan, it depends only on her, for he asked her hand more than six months ago. Madame did not oppose it; and, in fact, M. de Bevallan is the richest in the country, after the Laroques; but mademoiselle would not give a decided answer, but wished to take time for reflection."

"But if she loves M. de Bevallan, and if she can marry him whenever she wishes it, why is she always sad and absent-minded, as one sees her?"

"It is true, monsieur, that mademoiselle is entirely changed within two or three years. Formerly, she was like a bird for gayety—now one would say there is something which troubles her; but I do not believe, with all respect, that it is her love for this man."

"You do not appear to be very tender yourself toward M. de Bevallan, my good Alain. He is of excellent birth, however."

"That does not prevent him from being a bad fellow, who spends his time in debauching the country girls. And if monsieur has the use of his eyes, he can see that he does not restrain himself from playing the Sultan in the chateau, while waiting for something better."

There was a pause, after which Alain resumed:

"Pity that monsieur has not a hundred thousand francs income."

"And why so, Alain?"

"Because," said Alain, nodding his head with a dreamy air.

July 25.

In the course of the month, which is nearly passed away, I have gained one friend, and I have made, I think, two enemies. The enemies are Mlle. Marguerite and Mlle. Helouin; the friend is an unmarried lady of eighty-eight. I am afraid one does not compensate for the other.

Mlle. Helouin, with whom I will first settle my account, is an ungrateful person. The fault that she pretends I have been guilty of toward her ought rather to have raised me in her estimation; but she appears to be one of those women, common enough in the world, who do not rank esteem among the number of sentiments they wish to inspire others with, or which they feel toward others. From my earliest residence here a similarity between the condition of the governess and that of the



steward, and the equality of our positions in the chateau, made me assume toward Mlle. Helouin the relation of affectionate kindness. I had prided myself, at all times, on manifesting to these poor girls, the kindly interest which their ungrateful task, their precarious and humiliating situation seemed to me to demand for them. Mlle. Helouin is pretty, intelligent, full of talent, and though she spoils all a little by the vivacity of conduct, the feverish coquetry, and light pedantry, which are the frequent results of her occupations, I had very little merit in playing the chivalrous part that I have ascribed to myself. This character took the form of duty, in my eyes, when I discovered that a devouring lion, wearing the features of Francis the First, is roaming secretly about my young protegee. This knavery, which does honor to M. de Bevallan's audacity, is carried on under the color of amiable familiarity, with a craftiness which easily deceives inattentive or ingenuous eyes. Madame Laroque, and her daughter in particular, are too ignorant of the perversities of this world, and live too far from all reality, to experience a shadow of suspicion. As to myself, irritated as I am against this devourer of hearts, I find a pleasure in thwarting his designs; I have more than once diverted the attention he endeavored to engross; I have striven above all to lessen in Mlle. Helouin's heart that bitter feeling of abandonment and isolation which in general gives so much value to that sort of consolation which was offered to her. Have I ever exceeded in this ill-advised struggle the delicate limits of fraternal protection? I believe not; and the words of the short dialogue which has suddenly changed the nature of our relations, seem to speak in favor of my prudence.

One night last week we went out upon the terrace to breathe the fresh air. Mlle. Helouin, to whom I had had occasion during the day to show some particular attention, leaned lightly upon my arm, and while biting an orange-flower with her small white teeth, said in an unsteady voice:

"You are kind, Monsieur Maximilian."

"I try to be so, mademoiselle."

"You are a true friend."

"Yea."

"But a friend—how?"

"A true one, as you said."

"A friend—who loves me?"

"Without doubt."

"Much?"

"Assuredly."

"Passionately?"

"No."

Upon hearing this monosyllable, which I articulated very clearly and strengthened by a firm look, Mlle. Helouin threw the orange-flower quickly away and dropped my arm. Since that unlucky hour, I have been treated with a disdain that I have not shrunk from, and I should decidedly believe the friendship of one sex for the other to be an illusion, if my misadventure had not had a sort of counterpoise the next day.

I had gone to pass the evening at the chateau; two or three families who had spent a fortnight there had left in the morning, and I found only the habitual visitors—the cure, the collector, the Doctor Desmarests, and finally, the General de Saint-Cast and his wife, who, as well as the doctor, live in the neighboring town. Madame de Saint-Cast, who seems to have brought her husband a fine fortune, was engaged when I entered in an animated conversation with Madame Aubry. These two dames understand one another perfectly; they celebrate by turns, like two shepherds in an eclogue, the incomparable charms of riches, in a style where difference of form contends with elevation of thought.

"You are right, madame," said Madame Aubry; "there is but one thing in the world, it is to be rich. When I was rich I despised with all my heart those who were not; I find it very natural now that I should be despised, and I do not complain of it."

"No one despises you for being poor, madame," replied Madame de Saint-Cast; "very certainly not, madame; but it is certain that to be rich or to be poor makes a wonderful

difference. There is the general, who knows something of it, he who had absolutely nothing when I married him—but his sword; and it is not a sword which will butter soup, is it, madame?"

"No, no! Oh, no, madame," cried Madame Aubry, applauding this bold metaphor. "Honor and glory are very fine things in romances, but I think a good carriage is much better; is it not so, madame?"

"Yes, certainly, madame; and that is what I said this morning to the general in coming here; is it not, general?"

"Hum!" growled the general, who was moodily playing in the corner with the old captain.

"You had nothing when I married you, general," returned Madame de Saint-Cast; "you would not think of denying it, I hope?"

"You have already said so," muttered the general.

"It is none the less true that if it were not for me you would go on foot, my general, and that would not be so fine with your wounds. It is not with a pension of six or seven thousand francs that you could ride in a carriage, my friend. I said that to him this morning, madame, in talking of our new carriage, which is as easy as easy can be. However, I paid a high price for it; it made a good four thousand francs less in my purse, madame!"

"I believe it, madame! My visiting carriage cost me nearly five thousand francs, counting the tiger's skin for the feet, which alone cost five hundred francs."

"As to me," replied Madame de Saint-Cast, "I have been compelled to economize a little, for I have furnished my saloon, and I have bought only the carpet and hangings with fifteen thousand francs. They are too handsome for a provincial hole, you will say, and it is very true; but all the town is on their knees before them, and one loves to be admired; is it not so, madame?"

"Without doubt, madame," returned Madame Aubry, "one loves to be admired, and one is admired only in proportion to the money one has. For me, I console myself for not being more honored now, in thinking that if I were still what I have been, I should see at my feet all the people who slight me."

"Except me—zounds!" cried Doctor Desmarests, rising suddenly; you might have a hundred millions yearly and you would not see me at your feet, I give you my word of honor. There—I must go into the fresh air; for, the devil take me, one can bear no more of it!"

And with this the brave doctor left the saloon, carrying my gratitude with him, for he had rendered me a real service by relieving my heart, oppressed with indignation and disgust.

Although Doctor Desmarests was established in the house on the footing of a St. Jean Bouche d'Or, to whom was allowed the greatest independence of speech, the apostrophe was too sharp not to cause the spectators a feeling of uneasiness, which was manifested by an embarrassed silence. Madame Laroque skillfully broke it by asking her daughter if it was eight o'clock.

"No, mother," replied Mlle. Marguerite, "for Mlle. de Porhoet is not come yet."

The minute after, as the clock began to strike, the door opened, and Mlle. Jocelynde de Porhoet-Gael, leaning on Doctor Desmarests's arm, entered the room, with astronomical precision.

Mlle. Porhoet, who this year had seen her eighty-eighth spring, and who had the appearance of a long reed preserved in silk, was the last of a noble race, whose earliest ancestors might be found among the fabulous kings of ancient Armorica. Seriously, however, this house does not appear in history till the twelfth century in the person of Juthael, son of Conan le Fort, descended from the younger branch of the royal family of Brittany. Some drops of the blood of the Porhoets have flowed in the veins of the most illustrious men of France: De Rohan, De Lusignan, and De Penthièvre; and these noblemen considered it the purest of their blood. I remember, when studying one day the history of our family alliances, in a fit

of youthful vanity, I remarked among them this peculiar name of Porhoet; and my father, who was very learned in such matters, boasted of it to me.

Mlle. de Porhoet, who to-day remains the last of her name, has never wished to marry, in order to preserve, as long as possible, in the firmament of the French nobility the constellation of these magic syllables—Porhoet-Gael!

Some one chanced to speak (before her) one day of the origin of the Bourbons. "The Bourbons," said Mlle. de Porhoet, plunging her knitting-needle several times into her blonde wig, "the Bourbons are of good nobility, but," (putting on suddenly an air of modesty) "there are better."

It is impossible, nevertheless, to bow before this august old lady, who bears with unequalled dignity the triple and heavy majesty of birth, of age, and of misfortune. A deplorable lawsuit that she obstinately carries on, out of France, has gradually reduced her small fortune; there can hardly be to her now an income of a thousand francs a year. This trouble has not lessened her pride, or increased her temper; she is merry, equable, courteous; she lives, no one knows how, in a little house, with a little servant, and yet she finds means to bestow a great deal in charity. Madame Laroque and her daughter have formed an attachment for their poor and noble neighbor which does them honor; she is, when visiting them, the grand object of respect and attention, which confounds Madame Aubry. I have often seen Mlle. Marguerite quit a lively dance to go make the fourth at Mlle. de Porhoet's whist-table; if Mlle. de Porhoet's game of whist (at five centimes the counter) was lacking one single day, the world would end. I am myself one of the favorite partners of this old lady; and on this evening of which I speak, we did not delay—the cure, the doctor and myself—to place ourselves around the whist-table, at each side and in the front of this descendant of Conan le Fort.

It must be understood that at the commencement of the last century, a great uncle of Mlle. de Porhoet, who was in the suite of the Duc d'Anjou, crossed the Pyrenees, when that prince became Philip V. and established himself prosperously in Spain. His direct heirs died fifteen years ago, and Mlle. Porhoet, who had never lost sight of her relatives beyond the mountains, declared herself the heiress of their fortune, which was said to be considerable: her claims were contested, very justly, by one of the oldest houses in Castile, allied to the Spanish branch of the Porhoets. Hence the lawsuit which the unfortunate octogenarian pursues from court to court at great expense, with a persistency almost amounting to a mania, which afflicts her friends, and amuses indifferent acquaintances. Doctor Desmarests does not allow himself to join the number of those who laugh, and is the more scrupulous because, notwithstanding the respect he professes for Mlle. de Porhoet, he disapproves explicitly of the use to which the poor woman devotes in her imagination her chimerical inheritance—it is the erection in the neighboring city of a cathedral, in the finest flamboyant style, which will preserve through future ages the name of its foundress and that of a great but extinct race. This cathedral, a dream grafted on a dream, is the innocent plaything of this aged child. She has had her plans of it drawn; she passes her days, sometimes her nights, in meditating on its splendors, in changing its arrangements, or in adding ornaments to it, and she speaks of it as of a monument already half built.

"I was in the nave of my cathedral; I remarked a very odious thing in the north aisle to-night; I have changed the beadle's livery, et cetera."

"Well! mademoiselle," said the doctor, as he shuffled the cards, "have you worked at your cathedral since yesterday?"

"Yes, doctor; a very happy idea has occurred to me. I have replaced the plain wall, which separates the choir from the sacristy, by foliage in wrought stone, in imitation of the Chapel of Clisson in the Church of Josselin. It is much lighter."



"Yes, certainly; but what news from Spain in the meantime? Ah! is it true? as I think I read this morning in the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, that the young Duke of Villa-Hermosa proposed to you to terminate your lawsuit amicably by marriage?"

Mlle. Porhoet tossed her head with a disdainful motion, shaking the bunch of faded ribbons which floated over her cap—"I should refuse distinctly," said she.

"Yes, yes, you say that, Mademoiselle; but what means then that sound of a guitar which has been heard for some nights under your windows?"

"Bah!"

"Bah! And this Spaniard, in mantle and yellow boots, whom one sees roaming about the country and sighing incessantly?"

"You are a wag," said Mlle. Porhoet, tranquilly opening her snuff-box. "For the rest, since you wish to know, my man of business wrote to me from Madrid, two days ago, that with a little patience we should doubtless see the end of our sorrows."

"Parbleu, I believe it, indeed! Do you know where he comes from, your man of business? From the cavern of Gil Blas, direct. He will receive your last crown, and will make a fool of you. Ah! if you would only be advised to put down this folly and live tranquilly! How would millions serve you? Are you not happy, and held in consideration—and what do you want more? As to your cathedral, I do not speak of it, because it is a bad jest."

"My cathedral is a bad jest only in the eyes of bad jesters, Doctor Desmarests; besides, I defend my rights; I contend for justice; the property belongs to me, I have heard it said a hundred times by my father, and it shall never go with my consent to people who are as much strangers to my family as you, my dear friend, or as monsieur," added she, indicating me with a motion of her head.

I had the childishness to be stung by this politeness, and I retorted: "As far as I am concerned, mademoiselle, you are mistaken, for my family had the honor of marrying with yours and reciprocally."

On hearing these heinous words, Mlle. Porhoet put the cards, arranged like a fan, in her hand to her pointed chin, and straightening her emaciated figure, she looked me in the face in order to satisfy herself as to the state of my reason, then regained her calmness by a superhuman effort, and putting a pinch of Spanish snuff to her thin nose, said: "You shall prove that to me, young man."

Ashamed of my ridiculous boasting, and very much embarrassed by the inquisitive looks that it had drawn upon me, I bowed awkwardly without answering her. Our game was finished in a dull silence. It was ten o'clock, and I was preparing to steal away, when Mlle. de Porhoet touched my arm: "Mr. Steward, will you do me the honor of accompanying me to the end of the avenue?"

I again bowed and followed her.

July 25.

We soon found ourselves in the park. The little servant, in her provincial costume, preceded us, carrying a lantern; then Mlle. de Porhoet, holding with a careful hand the thin folds of her silk dress: she had coldly refused the offer of my arm, and I walked at her side, my head lowered, and very ill-pleased with myself. After some minutes of this gloomy walk—"Well, sir," said the old lady to me, "speak then, I am waiting. You have said that my family had been allied to yours, and as an alliance of this kind is a point of history entirely new to me, I shall be very much obliged to you if you will enlighten me upon it."

I had decided in my own mind that I ought, at any cost, to maintain the secret of my incognito.

"Mon Dieu! mademoiselle," I replied, "I hope you will excuse a pleasantry which escaped me in the course of conversation."

"A pleasantry!" cried Mlle. de Porhoet; "the subject, in truth, affords much pleas-

antry. And what do you call, in this age, the pleasantries that are openly addressed to an old, unprotected woman, and that no one would dare to allow himself to address to a man?"

"Mademoiselle, you leave me no retreat possible; nothing more remains for me but to confide in your discretion. I do not know, mademoiselle, whether the name of Champcey d'Hauterive is known to you?"

"I know perfectly, monsieur, the Champcey d'Hauterives, who are a good, an excellent family of Dauphiny. What conclusion do you draw from it?"

"I am to-day the representative of this family."

"You?" said Mlle. de Porhoet, making a sudden halt; "you are a Champcey d'Hauterive?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"That alters the case," said she; "give me your arm, cousin, and tell me your history."

I believed that in the present state of things it was best to conceal nothing from her. I terminated the painful recital of the misfortunes of my family just as we found ourselves in front of a small house, singularly narrow and low, which was flanked on one of the angles by a kind of pigeon-house, with a pointed roof. "Enter, marquis," said the daughter of the kings of Gael, stopping on the threshold of her poor palace; "enter, I beg of you." The instant after I was introduced into a little parlor with a brick floor; on the pale tapestry which covered the walls hung a dozen family portraits, emblazoned with the ducal ermine; on the mantle-piece I saw shining a magnificent clock of shell, inlaid with copper and surmounted by a group representing the Chariot of the Sun. Some easy chairs with oval backs, and an old sofa with slender legs, completed the decoration of this room, where everything spoke of rigid propriety, and where one breathed concentrated odor of iris, Spanish snuff, and uncertain aromatic drugs.

"Sit down," said the old lady, seating herself on the sofa; "sit down, cousin, for though in reality we are not relatives, and cannot be so, since Jeanne de Porhoet and Hughes de Champcey had the folly, between you and me, the folly not to increase the stock, it would be agreeable to me, with your permission, to treat you as a cousin, in private, in order to beguile the sad feelings of my loneliness for the time. The past is indeed bitter, but I will suggest some thoughts which are habitual to me, and which seem of a nature to afford you sincere consolation. In the first place, my dear marquis, I often say to myself that there is an odor of distinction and good taste in poverty, when I see the simpletons and former servants riding to-day in their carriages. Besides, I am not far from believing that God has chosen to reduce some among us to straits, in order that this gross, material age, greedy of gold, may always have before its eyes in our persons, a species of merit, of dignity, of lustre, where gold and substance pass for nothing, which nothing can buy, which is not to be sold! Such, cousin, is, according to all appearance, the providential justification of your condition and of mine."

I expressed to Mlle. de Porhoet how proud I was at having been chosen with her to give to the world the noble instructions, of which it had so much need, and by which it was so little disposed to profit. Then she resumed: "For my own part, monsieur, I am made for indigence, and I suffer little from it; when one has seen in the course of a life already too long, a father, worthy his name, and four brothers, worthy of their father, fall by the bullet or the steel; when one has seen all the objects of one's affections and one's worship, successively perish, one must have a very small soul to be occupied about a more or less abundant table, or a toilet more or less fresh. Truly, marquis, if my personal comfort were the only consideration, you may believe that I should be very indifferent about my millions from Spain; but it seems suitable, and a good example, that a house like mine should not disappear from the earth without leaving after

it some lasting trace, some glorious monument of its grandeur and its faith. This is why, in imitation of some of my ancestors, I have dreamed, cousin, and I will never give it up while I have life, of the pious endowments which you have heard spoken of."

Being assured of my assent, the noble old woman seemed to collect her thoughts, and while she gazed with a melancholy expression upon the half-effaced portraits of her ancestors, the hereditary clock alone disturbed the midnight silence, in the dim parlor.

"There will be," Mlle. de Porhoet suddenly resumed, in a singularly solemn voice, "there will be a chapter of canons regularly attached to the service of this church. Each day at matins, a low mass will be said in the private chapel of my family, for the repose of my soul and the souls of my ancestors. The feet of the officiating priest will rest upon a marble slab without inscription, which will form the step of the altar, and will also cover my remains."

I bowed with visible and respectful emotion.

Mlle. de Porhoet took my hand and pressed it gently. "I am not crazy, cousin," said she, "although I am called so. My father, who did not lie, always assured me that at the extinction of the direct descendants of our Spanish branch, we should have the sole right to the inheritance; his sudden and violent death prevented him, unfortunately, from giving us more precise information on this subject; but being unable to doubt his word, I cannot doubt my right. However," added she, after a pause, and with an accent of touching sadness, "if I am not crazy, I am old, and those men down there know it well. They have drawn me on for fifteen years with one delay and another; they are waiting for my death, which will end everything—and you see they will not need to wait long; I must make my last sacrifice one of these days, I feel it. This poor cathedral, my sole love—which has replaced in my heart so much crushed or repulsed affection—it will never have more than one stone, that of my tomb."

The old lady ceased. She brushed away two tears from her withered face with her thin hands, and, forcing a smile, added: "Pardon me, cousin, you have troubles enough of your own. Excuse me—besides, it is late; retire, you will compromise me."

Before leaving, I again recommended to Mlle. de Porhoet's discretion, the secret I had confided. She replied evasively, that I might be tranquil; that she should know how to guard my peace and my dignity. But I suspected, from the frequent glances I received from Madame Laroque a few days later, that my good friend had communicated my secret. Mlle. de Porhoet did not hesitate to acknowledge it, assuring me she could not do less for the honor of her family, and that, moreover, Madame Laroque was incapable of betraying it, even to her daughter.

My conference with the old lady inspired me with a tender respect, and I have endeavored to manifest it to her. The next evening I commenced drawing plans for the interior and exterior ornamentation of her dear cathedral, with the utmost skill I possess. She was greatly pleased by this attention, and almost every evening, after the game of whist is finished, I go to my drawing, and the ideal church is enriched by a statue, a pulpit, or a gallery. Mlle. Murguerite, who seems to regard her neighbor with a feeling of adoration, has contributed to my work of charity, by devoting an album to this monument of the Porhoets, which I am charged to fill.

I have offered, besides, to assist Mlle. de Porhoet in the investigations and proceedings of all kinds necessary to forward her suit. The poor woman acknowledged that I could be of the greatest service to her, for though she could still keep up her ordinary correspondence, her eyes were too weak to decipher the manuscripts in her possession, and she had shrunk from incurring the raillery of her neighbors by engaging any to undertake this labor. In short, she accepted



me as both counsel and assistant. I have since most conscientiously studied the voluminous papers relating to her lawsuit, and I am convinced that the cause, which will soon have its final trial, is hopelessly lost. M. Laubepin, whom I have consulted, is of the same opinion, which I have concealed from my good old friend as far as possible. In the meantime, I give her the pleasure of seeing me examine, paper by paper, her family archives, in which she constantly hoped to discover some title decisive in her favor. Unfortunately, these archives are very extensive, and the pigeon-house, their place of deposit, is filled with them from the top to the bottom.

Yesterday I went early to Mlle. de Porhoet's, in order to complete the examination of bundle No. 115, which I began the previous evening, before the hour for breakfast. The mistress of the house had not risen, and I seated myself quietly in the parlor, by consent of the little servant, and began my dusty work. At the end of an hour, as I was gladly running over the last leaf of bundle No. 115, Mlle. de Porhoet entered, carrying with difficulty an enormous package, carefully covered with white linen.

"Good-morning, my kind cousin," said she. "Hearing that you gave yourself so much trouble for me this morning, I have given myself a little trouble for you. I have brought you the bundle No. 116."

In some tale, there is an unhappy princess shut up in a tower, and a wicked fairy, who hates her family, imposes on her, time after time, work of the most extraordinary and impossible kind. I confess, that in spite of her many virtues, Mlle. de Porhoet seemed to me at that moment to be a near relative of that fairy.

"I dreamed last night," she continued, "that this bundle contains the key to my Spanish treasure. You will oblige me very much by not deferring its examination. When this is done, you will do me the honor to partake of a modest repast that I intend to offer you in my arbor."

I resigned myself to my fate. It is needless to say that the happy bundle 116 contained, like its predecessors, only the useless dust of ages. Precisely at noon, the old lady came to offer me her arm, and conducted me, with great ceremony, into a little garden, set round with box, and, which formed, with an end of the adjoining meadow, all the actual domain of the Porhoets. The table was laid under an elm tree, the branches of which were bent so as to form an arbor. It was a beautiful summer's day, and the sunlight, which here and there penetrated the shade, fell upon the brilliantly white and scented tablecloth. I had done honor to the poulet doie, the fresh salad, and to the bottle of old Bordeaux wine, which composed our feast, when Mlle. de Porhoet, who seemed delighted with my appetite, turned the conversation upon the Laroque family.

"I confess to you," said she, "I do not like the old sailor. I remember when he came into this country, he had a large monkey which he dressed like a servant, and which seemed to understand him perfectly. This animal was a real pest to the neighborhood, and only a man without education and without decency could have been so wrapt up in it. It was called a monkey, and I am willing it should be, but in my heart I think it was a negro, and the more so, because I have always suspected his master to have been engaged in the slave-trade on the coast of Africa. However, the son, the late M. Laroque, was a good man, and a very *comme il faut*. As to the ladies—I speak of Madame Laroque and her daughter, and not of the widow Aubry, who is a mean woman of low birth—as to those ladies, I say, there is no praise which they do not merit."

At this moment the sound of a horse's feet was heard in the path just outside the garden wall, and in another instant some one knocked at a little door close to the arbor.

"Well," said Mlle. de Porhoet, "who is there?"

I looked up and saw a black plume waving above the top of the wall.

"Open," said a clear, musical voice, gayly, "open, it is the Fortune of France!"

"What! it is you, my darling," cried the old lady. "Run quick, cousin."

On opening the door, I was nearly thrown down by Mervyn, as he dashed past me into the garden, and I perceived Mlle. Marguerite, who was engaged in fastening her horse to the bars of a fence.

"Good morning, monsieur," said she, without exhibiting the least surprise at finding me there. Then gathering up the folds of her riding-habit upon her arm, she entered the garden.

"You are very welcome this beautiful day," said Mlle. de Porhoet; "kiss me. You have ridden very fast, mad girl, for your face is a bright purple, and fire seems literally flashing from your eyes. What can I offer you?"

"Let us see," said Mlle. Marguerite, glancing at the table, "what have you there? Monsieur has eaten everything. No matter, I am not hungry—I am only thirsty."

"I forbid you drinking in such a state as you are in; but wait—there are some strawberries in that bed."

"Strawberries! *o gioia!*" sang the young girl—"quick, monsieur! take one of those large leaves, and come with me."

While I was selecting one of the largest leaves from a fig-tree, Mlle. de Porhoet watched with a smile of approbation the proud march of her favorite across the garden-walks in the full sun: "Look at her, cousin," said she, in a low voice, "is she not worthy to belong to us?"

Mlle. Marguerite, tripping in her long skirt at almost every step as she bent over the strawberry-bed, hailed with a little shout of joy each strawberry she found. She would now and then put one berry upon the fig-leaf that I held in my hand, for every two she ate, to give her patience. When she had gathered all she wished, we returned in triumph to the arbor; the strawberries that we had brought were sugared, and then eaten.

"Ah! that has done me good!" said Mlle. Marguerite, throwing her hat on a seat and leaning against the hedge. "And now to complete my happiness, my dear lady, you will relate to me some history of former days, of the time when you were a beautiful warrior."

Mlle. de Porhoet, smiling and delighted, did not wait for a second request, but related some of the most striking episodes in her campaigns in the suites of the Lesclures and the Laroche-jacquelines. I had, on this occasion, a new proof of my old friend's elevation of soul, in hearing her render homage to all the heroes of those gigantic struggles, regardless of the flags under which they fought. She spoke, in particular, of General Hoche, whose captive she once was, with an almost tender interest. Mlle. Marguerite listened to these recitals with a passionate attention which astonished me. Sometimes, half-hidden by the hedge, and her long eyelashes lowered, she would preserve the immobility of a statue; sometimes a keener interest would be roused, and she would place her elbows on the little table, and plunging her hand in the waves of her hair, she would dart on the old Vendean the continuous lightning of her large eyes.

I shall always count among the sweetest hours of my sad life, those that I spent in contemplating that noble face, radiant with the reflection of the clear sky and the sympathy of a courageous heart.

When Mlle. de Porhoet ceased her reminiscences, Mlle. Marguerite embraced her, and rousing Mervyn, asleep at her feet, announced her intended return to the chateau. I had no scruples about returning thither at the same time, feeling certain I should cause her no embarrassment. Beside the extreme insignificance of my person and my company, in the eyes of the wealthy heiress, a *tete-a-tete* generally gave her no annoyance, her mother having given her the liberal education that she had her-

self received in one of the British colonies. It is well known that the English give women, before marriage, all the independence which we so wisely grant them on the day when any abuse of it becomes irreparable.

We therefore left the garden together; I held the stirrup while she mounted her horse, and we went toward the chateau. After we had taken a few steps, "Mon dieu! Monsieur," said she, "I came to disturb you very unseasonably, it seems to me. You were in very agreeable society."

"It is true, mademoiselle; but as I had been there a long time, I forgive you, and even I thank you."

"You show great attention to our poor neighbor. My mother is very grateful to you for it."

"And your mother's daughter?" said I, laughing.

"Ah! I do not bestow praise so readily. If you have the idea that I admire you, you must have the goodness to wait a little longer. I am not in the habit of judging human actions lightly; they generally have two aspects. I acknowledge that your conduct toward Mlle. Porhoet has a good appearance, but"—she paused, shook her head, and resumed in a serious, bitter, and even insulting tone—"but I am not very sure that you are not paying court to her in the hope of being made her heir."

I felt myself grow pale. Reflecting, however, on the ridiculousness of replying angrily to this young girl, I restrained myself and said to her, gravely, "Allow me, mademoiselle, to pity you sincerely."

She appeared very much surprised: "To pity me, monsieur?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, suffer me to express to you the respectful pity to which it seems to me you have a right."

"Pity!" said she, stopping her horse, and turning toward me with eyes half shut with disdain. "I have not the honor to understand you."

"My meaning is very simple, however, mademoiselle; if disbelief in all goodness, if distrust and barrenness of soul, are the bitterest fruits of experience, during a long life, nothing in the world merits compassion more than a heart withered by distrust before it has lived."

"Monsieur," replied Mlle. Laroque, with unusual vivacity, "you do not know what you are talking about! and," added she more sharply, "you forget to whom you are talking."

"That is true, mademoiselle," I gently replied, bowing; "I spoke without knowledge, and I forgot to whom I spoke; but you set me the example."

Mlle. Marguerite, whose eyes were fixed on the top of the trees which shaded the road, said, with ironical dignity, "Must I ask your pardon?"

"Assuredly, mademoiselle," I replied with emphasis, "if one of us has to ask forgiveness of the other, it will be you: you are rich, and I am poor; you can humble yourself—I cannot!"

There was silence. Her compressed lips, her distended nostrils, her sudden pallor, showed the violence of the inward struggle. Suddenly, lowering her head as for a salutation: "Ah, well!" said she, "forgive me!" At the same time she struck her horse a violent blow and set off on a gallop, leaving me in the middle of the road.

I have not seen her since.

July 30.

The calculation of probabilities is never more unprofitable than when it is exercised on the subject of a woman's thoughts and feelings. Not caring to find myself so soon in Mlle. Marguerite's presence, after the painful scene which had taken place between us, I had spent two days without going to the chateau. I hardly hoped this short interval would have sufficed to calm the resentment I had caused in her proud heart. However, yesterday morning, about seven o'clock, as I was writing near the open window of my turret, I heard myself



called in a tone of friendly gayety, by the very person whom I believed had made an enemy.

"Monsieur Odiot, are you there?"

I presented myself at my window, and I saw in a boat, stationed near the bridge, Mlle. Marguerite, holding back the brim of her large straw hat, and looking up at my dark tower.

"Here I am, mademoiselle," said I eagerly.

"Will you take a walk?"

After the fears with which I had been tormented for the last two days, so much condescension made me fear I was the plaything of some foolish dream.

"I beg pardon, mademoiselle—what did you say?"

"Will you come to take a little walk with Alain, Mervyn and me?"

"Certainly, mademoiselle."

"Very well! take your album."

I hastened down and ran along the side of the river.

"Ah! ah!" said the young girl laughingly to me, you are in a good humor this morning, it appears?"

I murmured awkwardly some confused reply, to the end that I was always in a good humor, of which Mlle. Marguerite seemed incredulous; then I sprang into the boat and seated myself at her side.

"Row, Alain," said she; and the old man, who prided himself on being a master boatman, began to pull at the oars methodically, which gave him the appearance of a heavy bird making vain efforts to fly. "It was necessary," said Mlle. Marguerite, "for me to come and tear you away from your castle, since you have obstinately sulked there for two days."

"Mademoiselle, I assure you that discretion alone—respect—fear"—

"Ah! Mon Dieu! respect—fear—you have sulked. We know better than you, positively. My mother, who maintains, I do not well know why that we ought to treat you with great consideration, has begged me to sacrifice myself on the altar of your pride, and being an obedient daughter, I sacrifice myself."

I expressed frankly my warm gratitude to her.

"Not to do things by halves!" she resumed, "I resolved to give a treat to your fancy, your taste; behold, therefore, a beautiful summer morning, the forests, and open glades, with all the effects of light desirable, birds singing amidst the foliage, a mysterious bark gliding over the water—you who love such things ought to be content."

"I am enchanted, mademoiselle."

"Ah! that is not bad."

I was, indeed, satisfied, for the moment, with my destiny. The banks between which we glided were covered with newly-cut hay, which scented the air. I saw fly past us the somber avenues of the park in which the morning sun scattered trails of light; millions of insects, intoxicated with the dew in the calices of the flowers, hummed joyously around us. Opposite me, the good Alain smiled upon me at each stroke of the oar, with an air of complacency and protection; nearer me, Mlle. Marguerite, dressed in white, contrary to her custom, beautiful, fresh, and pure as a periwinkle, shook off with one hand the pearly drop which the early morning air had suspended to the lace of her hat, and held the other as an attraction to the faithful Mervyn, following us in the water. Truly it would not have required any urgent solicitation to make me go to the end of the world in this little white boat.

As we left the boundaries of the park by passing under one of the arches which pierced the wall inclosing it: "You do not ask me, monsieur, where I am taking you," said the young Creole.

"No, no, mademoiselle, it is equally unimportant to me."

"I am taking you into fairy-land."

"I doubt that."

"Mlle. Helouin, more versed than I in poetic matters, ought to have told you that the clumps of trees which cover the country for twenty leagues round, are the remains of the old forest of Brocelyande, where the ancestors

of your friend, Mlle. de Porhoet, the sovereigns of Gael, hunted, and where the grandfather of Mervyn was enchanted, enchanter though he was himself, by a young girl, by the name of Vivian. But we shall soon be in the center of this forest. But if this is not sufficient to excite your imagination, know that the woods still preserve a thousand traces of the mysterious religion of the Celts; they are paved with them. You have therefore good cause to picture to yourself a Druid, in a white robe, under each of those shades, and to see a golden sickle glitter in each ray of the sun. The religion of these intolerable old men has even left near here in a solitary spot, romantic, picturesque, *et cetera*, a monument, before which those persons disposed to ecstasy are accustomed to swoon; I thought you would take pleasure in sketching it, and as the place is not easy to find, I resolved to serve you as a guide, demanding no other reward than to be spared the explosions of an enthusiasm which I should not know how to sympathize with."

"Be it so, mademoiselle, I will restrain myself."

"I pray you to do so."

"That is understood. And what do you call this monument?"

"For myself, I call it a heap of large stones; some of the antiquarians call it, simply a *dolmen*, others, more pretentious, a *cromlech*; the country people name it, without explaining why, *themigourdil*."

Our boat moved gently along with the current of the stream between two strips of damp meadow; small black cattle, with long, sharp horns, rose here and there at the sound of the oars, and watched us pass with wild, savage eyes. The valley, through which the gradually widening river wound, was shut in by a chain of hills on each side; those on one side were covered with broom and dried vines and rushes; those on the other by green coppice-wood. From time to time, deep gullies between the hills opened a sinuous perspective, at the end of which one could see the blue summit of some distant mountain. Mlle. Marguerite, notwithstanding her professed incompetence, constantly pointed out to me the beauties of the landscape, at once so soft and so sharply defined, always accompanying her remarks by some ironical observations.

All at once a continuous hollow noise announced our near approach to a waterfall, and the valley closed, assuming the aspect of a wild, lonesome gorge. On our left rose a high wall of rocks, carpeted with moss; oaks mingled with firs, and ivy and hanging briers supporting themselves in the crevices of the hill down to the shore, threw a mysterious shadow on the deep water at the foot of the rocks. Some hundred steps before us the water spouted up, foaming, then suddenly disappeared, the broken line of the river again becoming visible through the white vapor, winding between green banks in a distant meadow. On our right, the bank opposite the hill presented only a narrow, sloping margin of the meadow, beyond which the wooded hills looked like a fringe of dark velvet.

"We will land here," said the young girl. And while Alain made the boat fast to a willow, she sprang lightly ashore.

"Well, monsieur, you do not find this bad? You are not confounded, petrified, thunder-struck? It is said this place is very pretty. I like it because it is always fresh; but follow me into these woods—if you dare—and I will show you these famous stones."

Mlle. Marguerite, lively, alert, and gay, crossed the meadow with two bounds and took a path which penetrated into the forest. Alain and I followed in Indian file. After a rapid walk of some minutes, our conductress stopped, appeared to deliberate and consider where she was; then separating two closely-tangled branches she quitted the path and dashed into the close coppice.

The walk became less agreeable. It was very difficult to force a passage through the various

young oaks, with their oblique trunks and thick branches, crossed and twisted together like Robinson Crusoe's palisades. Alain and I at last advanced with great difficulty, bent nearly double, knocking our heads at every step, and with each heavy movement shaking down upon ourselves a shower of dew; but Mlle. Marguerite, with the superior address, and the cat-like suppleness of her sex, glided, without any apparent effort, through the interstices of this labyrinth, laughing at our sufferings, and carelessly allowing the flexible branches to unbend behind her, hitting our faces, sometimes not very gently.

We at length reached a small opening which seemed to crown the summit of this hill; there I saw, not without emotion, the monstrous stone table, sustained by five or six enormous blocks which are half sunk in the earth, forming thus a cavern, full of a sacred horror. There was, at the first sight of this intact monument of an almost fabulous time, and of a primitive religion, a power of truth, a sort of real presence, which seized upon the soul, making one shudder. Some rays of sunlight, penetrating the foliage, filtered through the disjointed layers of stone, played upon the sinister slab, and lent an idyllic grace to this barbaric altar. Mlle. Marguerite seemed pensive and abstracted. For myself, after having penetrated into the cavern and examined the dolmen under all its aspects, I began to sketch it.

I had been so absorbed in this occupation for some minutes as to observe nothing of what passed around me, when Mlle. Marguerite suddenly said, "Would you like a Velleda to give animation to the picture?" I looked up; she had wound an oak wreath round her head, and was standing at the head of the dolmen, leaning lightly against a group of young trees; under the dim light of the foliage, her white dress had the brilliancy of marble, and her eyes sparkled with a strange fire in the shadow thrown by her crown. She was beautiful, and I believe she knew it. I gazed at her without knowing what to say, when she resumed, "If I annoy you I will go away."

"No, no, I beg you to stay."

"Well! make haste; draw Mervyn also; he shall be the Druid, and I the Druidess."

I had the good fortune to reproduce with tolerable fidelity, thanks to the vagueness of a sketch, the poetic vision with which I was favored. She came with an appearance of eagerness to examine my drawing. "It is not bad," said she. Then she threw away her wreath, as she laughingly said, "Confess that I am good!"

I acknowledged she was so; I would even have avowed, had she desired it, that she did not lack a grain of coquetry; but she would not be a woman without that, and perfection is hateful: goddesses themselves need, in order to be loved, something more than their immortal beauty.

We crossed through the inextricable copse, and, regaining the path in the forest, descended toward the river.

"Before we return," said Mlle. Marguerite, "I wish to show you the waterfall, and all the more because I count on giving myself a little amusement in my turn. Come, Mervyn! Come, my good dog! thou art a fine fellow!"

We soon found ourselves on the steep bank in front of the —, which closed the bed of the river. The water fell from the height of several feet into a large, deep, round basin, that seemed to be bounded on all sides by an amphitheater of green grass, interspersed with rocks. Some invisible rivulets served as outlets for the little lake, reuniting at a short distance and forming the river.

This is not exactly a Niagara," said Mlle. Marguerite, elevating her voice above the noise of the waterfall; "but I have heard it said by connoisseurs, by artists, that it is nevertheless very pretty. Have you admired it enough? Well! now I hope you will bestow on Mervyn whatever enthusiasm still remains. Here, Mervyn!"

The Newfoundland came to his mistress's side, and looked at her, trembling with im-



patience. The young girl first tied up some pebbles in her handkerchief, then threw it into the water a little above the fall; at the same instant Mervyn dropped like a block into the basin, and swam rapidly from the shore; the handkerchief was carried along by the current; it reached the cascade, danced an instant in an eddy, then shooting like an arrow over the rounded rock, it came whirling in a wave of foam under the very eyes of the dog; he seized it, and proudly regained the bank where Mlle. Marguerite stood clapping her hands.

This charming exercise was repeated several times with the same success, but on the sixth trial it happened that either Mervyn started too late, or the handkerchief was thrown too soon, for the poor dog missed it as it passed him. The handkerchief was carried by the eddies of the cascade into a thicket of brambles which showed themselves just above the water's edge. Mervyn went to fetch it; we were surprised to see him suddenly drop his prey, struggling convulsively and raise his head toward us, uttering most pitiful cries. "Oh! what has happened?" cried Mlle. Marguerite.

"I believe he is caught in those brambles; but he will easily free himself, do not fear."

Soon, however, we began to fear, then to despair. The network of vines in which the unfortunate Newfoundland was caught as in a snare was directly below the mouth of one of the outlets of the lake, and a ceaseless whirling stream fell on poor Mervyn's head. He was half suffocated, and had ceased to make the least effort to break his bonds, and his plaintive barking had a rattling sound. At this moment Mlle. Marguerite seized my arm and almost whispered in my ear, "He is lost! Come, monsieur, let us go away." I looked at her. Grief and anguish convulsed her pale face, drawing a livid circle beneath her eyes.

"There is no way," said I, "of bringing the boat down here; but I can swim, and if you will permit me I will go down and lend a paw to the poor fellow."

"No, no, do not attempt it—it is very far from here—and besides I have always heard the river was deep and dangerous below the fall."

"Be tranquil, mademoiselle; I am prudent." As I spoke, I threw my jacket on the grass, and plunged into the lake, taking care to keep a certain distance from the fall. The water was really very deep, for I did not touch bottom till the moment I reached the suffering dog. I do not know whether there had formerly been a little island here which had been gradually washed away, or if the river had deposited here some fragment from the high bank, but certainly a thick tangle of brambles and roots were concealed and growing under the perfidious water. I placed my feet on one of the stumps from which they seemed to grow, and succeeded in freeing Mervyn; as soon as he was master of his movements, he swam without delay toward the bank, abandoning me with all his heart. This trait was not in conformity with the chivalrous reputation enjoyed by his species; but the good Mervyn had always lived among men, and I suppose he had become a philosopher.

When I attempted to take a leap in order to follow him, I found with vexation that I was caught in my turn in the net of the jealous and wicked Naiad, who apparently reigns in this latitude. One of my legs was entangled in knots of the vines, which I vainly tried to break. One is not sufficiently at ease in deep water, and on a slimy bottom, to employ all one's strength; I was, besides, half blinded by the spray of the dashing, foaming water. In short, I felt that my situation became more and more critical. I looked up at the bank: Mlle. Marguerite was clinging to Alain's arm, and bending over the whirlpool, watching me with a look of mortal anxiety. I said to myself, that perhaps nothing more remained for me in the world but to be wept by those beautiful eyes to give an enviable termination to a worthless life. But I shook off those weak thoughts; with a violent effort I disengaged

myself, and tying the little tattered handkerchief around my neck, swam easily to the shore.

As I reached the bank, Mlle. Marguerite held out her hand; it trembled violently in mine. "What madness!" said she; "what madness! You might have died there!—and for a dog!" "It was yours," I replied to her, in the same low tone that she had used. This seemed to annoy her; she withdrew her hand quickly from mine, and turning to Mervyn, drying himself in the sun, began to caress him: "Oh, the simpleton! the great simpleton!" said she; "what a stupid fellow!"

The water ran off me down upon the grass in streams as if out of a watering-pot, and I did not know what to do with myself, when Mlle. Marguerite said with great sweetness: "Monsieur Maximilian, take the boat and go home quickly; the rowing will warm you a little. I will return through the forest with Alain; the road is much shorter than the river."

This arrangement seeming to me the fittest in all respects, I did not object to it. I bowed, and had for the second time the pleasure of touching the hand of Mervyn's mistress before stepping into the boat.

On making my toilet after reaching home, I was surprised to find the little torn handkerchief round my neck, which I had entirely forgotten to return to Mlle. Marguerite. She certainly believed it to be lost, and I had no scruples in retaining it as the price of my wet journey.

I went to the chateau that evening; Mlle. Laroque received me with the air of haughty indolence, of grave abstraction, and of bitter ennui, which is habitual to her, and which formed a singular contrast to the graceful good nature and agreeable vivacity of my morning companion. During the dinner, at which M. de Bevallan was present, she spoke of our excursion as if to deprive it of all appearance of mystery; she flung some sharp jests at all lovers of nature, and finished by recounting Mervyn's misadventure, but suppressed all my share in this last episode. If this reservation was intended, as I believe it was, to give the tone to my own discretion, the young lady took very needless trouble. Let it be as it might, when the recital was ended, M. de Bevallan dejected us by his exclamations of despair. "What! Mlle. Marguerite had suffered such prolonged anxiety, the brave Mervyn had incurred such peril, and he, Bevallan, was not there! He could never console himself, there was nothing for him to do but to hang himself like Crillon!"

"Well? if there were nobody but me to take him down," said old Alain to me, as he lighted me home that night, "I should not worry about it."

Yesterday did not commence as gayly for me as the preceding day. I received a letter from Madrid early in the morning commissioning me to announce to Mlle. Porhoet the definite loss of her suit. The agent informed me, moreover, that the family who were defendants in the cause would not profit by their present triumph, for they now found themselves involved in a suit with the government, whose attention had been roused by the noise made about these millions, and which maintained that the estate in litigation belonged to the Crown by escheatage. After reflecting a long time, it seemed to me an act of charity to conceal from my old friend the utter ruin of her hopes. I would make her Spanish agent an accomplice in my designs; he should invent pretexts for new delays; on my side, I would pursue my researches in her archives, and I would do all that lay in my power to have the poor woman continue, to her last hour, to cherish her dear illusions. But however legitimate the character of this deception might be, I felt a desire to have it sanctioned by some tender conscience.

I went to the chateau in the afternoon and made my confession to Madame Laroque; she approved of my plan, and praised me even more than the occasion seemed to me to require. It was with great surprise that I heard her close our conversation by these words:

"This is a proper time to tell you, monsieur, that I am deeply grateful for your solicitude for our welfare; and each day I have more pleasure in your company, more regard for you. I could wish, monsieur—I beg your pardon, for you can hardly share this wish—I could wish that we might never be separated. I humbly pray heaven to perform all the miracles essential to gain this end—for I do not hide from myself that miracles would be necessary."

I could not seize the precise meaning of this language any more than I could explain to myself the sudden emotion which shone in this excellent woman's eyes. I thanked her very properly, and went across the fields to dissipate my sadness by walking.

Accident—about which there was nothing strange, I frankly confess—led me, after an hour's walk, into the retired valley, upon the borders of the basin which had been the theater of my late exploits. The amphitheater of foliage and the rocks surrounding the little lake realize one's ideal of solitude. One can fancy himself at the end of the world, in a virgin country, in China, or wherever he wishes. I stretched myself upon the heather, and lived over again, in imagination, all the events of the preceding day; such a day as never comes twice in the course of the longest life. I already felt that a like day of happiness, if it were offered to me a second time, would not possess for me the same charm of serenity and, to speak the word, of innocence. I needed to tell myself that this sweet, youthful romance could have but one chapter, one page even, and I had read it. Yes, this hour, this hour of love, to call it by its right name, had been supremely sweet, because it had not been premeditated, because I had tasted its intoxication without being conscious of it! Now my conscience was awakened; I saw myself on the verge of an impossible, ridiculous love—worse than that—a guilty love. It was time to watch over myself, poor, disinherited man that I am.

I was giving myself these counsels in this solitary place—it had certainly not been very essential to come here to do it—when a murmuring of voices suddenly roused me from my abstraction. I partly rose, and saw advancing toward me a party of five or six persons, who had come here by boat. First came Mlle. Marguerite leaning on M. de Bevallan's arm, then Mlle. Helouin and Madame Aubry, followed by Alain and Mervyn. The noise of their approach had been covered by the rumbling of the waterfall; they were scarcely three steps from me, and I had no time to retreat, but had to bear the disagreeableness of being surprised in my reclining attitude. My presence in this place excited no particular attention; only I fancied I saw a shade of displeasure pass over Mlle. Marguerite's face, and she returned my salutation with marked stiffness.

M. de Bevallan placed himself on the edge of the basin, and wearied the echoes for some time with the stupid outbursts of his admiration: "Delicious! picturesque! how delightful! the pen of George Sand! the pen of Salvatore Rossa!"—accompanying it all with the most energetic gesture. At length he grew calm, and begged to be shown the place where Mervyn so nearly perished. Mlle. Marguerite recounted anew the adventure, observing, however, the same silence respecting my part in it. She even insisted with a sort of hard-heartedness on the bravery and presence of mind displayed by her dog, according to her report, on that occasion. She apparently supposed that her short-lived kindness and the service I had the good fortune to render her, had filled my brain with fancies which it was necessary to check.

Madame Aubry and Mlle. Helouin manifested so lively a desire to see Mervyn repeat his boasted performances before them, that Mlle. Marguerite called the Newfoundland, and threw her handkerchief into the water as on the preceding day; but at this signal, the brave Mervyn, in place of jumping into the lake, ran along the edge of the bank, coming and going with a distracted air, barking



and that I am concerned about you ; my heart, mademoiselle, is wholly yours, as I hope yours is mine ; and if it is so, you may be very sure and certain that there is not a living soul on earth or in heaven happier than your friend—who does not sign himself, but you well know who, mademoiselle."

"Do you know who, Mademoiselle Christine?" said I.

"That may be," said she, showing her white teeth, and gravely shaking her young head, illuminated with happiness. "Thanks, ladies and kind sir." She leaped from the step and disappeared in the wood, from which rose the clear, joyous sound of some Bretonnese song.

Madame Laroque had followed, with evident delight, all the details of this pastoral scene, which pleased her fancy ; she smiled on this girl with naked feet ; she was charmed. However, when Mademoiselle Oyadec was out of sight, a strange idea presented itself to Madame Laroque ; it was that she would have done well to bestow on the shepherdess a five-franc piece as well as her admiration!

"Alain!" she said, "call her back!"

"What for, mother?" said Mlle. Marguerite quickly, though she had not hitherto appeared to pay any attention to the incident.

"Why, my child, perhaps this girl does not understand perfectly all the pleasure I should have—and she ought to have herself—in running about in the sand with bare feet ; I think it proper at all events to leave her a little souvenir."

"Of money!" replied Mlle. Marguerite ; "oh! no, mother, do not do that ; do not mingle money with her happiness."

The expression of this refined feeling, which Christine would not have appreciated, from Mlle. Marguerite, did not astonish me, for I thought she was jesting, although her face gave me no indication of merriment. But this fancy, whether jesting or not, was taken in earnest by her mother, and it was decided to leave the shepherdess to her innocence and her bare feet.

After this, Madame Laroque, evidently well satisfied with herself, fell again into a smiling reverie, and Mlle. Marguerite resumed her play with her fan with increased gravity. An hour later we reached the end of our journey. The farm of Langoat, like most of the farms of this country, where the hills and tablelands are covered with heath, was situated in a valley traversed by a fine stream. The farmer's wife was much better, and immediately began to prepare our dinner, the principal materials for which we had taken the precaution to bring with us.

It was served on the natural turf of the meadow, in the shade of an enormous chestnut.

Madame Laroque, installed in a very uncomfortable attitude on the carriage cushions, was radiant with pleasure. "She was reminded," she said, "of those groups of reapers which she saw every summer sitting under shelter of the hedges, and whose rustic banquets she had always remarked with envy."

For myself, I should, perhaps, have found in former days a peculiar sweetness in the close intimacy that a repast on the ground, like all scenes of the kind, could not fail to establish between the guests ; but now, this feast of brotherhood was very bitter, and I put away from me, with a painful feeling of constraint, a spell which would need to be repeated of. After our dinner was finished, Madame Laroque said to me : "Have you ever been up there?" designating with her head a very high hill which commanded the country.

"No, madame."

"Oh! That is a pity. There is a very beautiful view there. You ought to see it. While they are harnessing, Marguerite can guide you there, can you not, Marguerite?"

"Me, mother? I have never been there but once, and that was a long time ago. No matter, I can find the way easily. Come, monsieur, and prepare for hard climbing."

We soon began to ascend rapidly a little path which wound up the side of the mountain, penetrating here and there thickets of trees. The young girl stopped, occasionally, in her light and rapid ascent, to see if I followed her, and, breathless from her walk, smiled without speaking. On reaching the plateau, a barren heath, I perceived at some distance a village church, the sharp angles of its small steeple clearly defined against the sky. "There it is," said my conductress, quickening her steps. Behind the church was a graveyard, enclosed by a high wall. She opened the door of the enclosure, and passing with difficulty through the brambles and high grass which encumbered this resting-place of the dead, directed her course toward a flight of steps in the form of a semicircle, at the extremity of the graveyard. These steps, disjointed by time, and singularly ornamented with massive globes or spheres, led up to a narrow platform, elevated to a level with the wall, and a granite cross rising from the center.

Mlle. Marguerite had no sooner reached the platform and taken one survey of the vast space opened around her, than I saw her place her hand obliquely over her eyes, as if to shade them. I hastened to join her.

This beautiful day, now drawing to a close, lighted up, with its final splendor, a scene vast, strange, and sublime, which I shall never forget. Before us and at a great distance below the plateau, there extended, as far as the eye could reach, a kind of marsh, dotted here and there with bright spots, and which presented the appearance of land half abandoned by an ebbing tide. This large bay reached almost under our feet, to the foot of the mountains. On the banks of sand and mud separating the lagoons, there was a mingled vegetation of rushes and sea-weeds wearing a thousand tints, equally dark and yet distinct, which contrasted with the shining surface of the water. As the sun rapidly neared the horizon, he alternatively illuminated, or threw into shadow, some one of the innumerable lakes which spotted the half-dried gulf ; he seemed to draw from his celestial casket the most precious materials, gold, silver, rubies, and diamonds, to display them by turns, on every point of this magnificent plain. Just as he sunk below the horizon, a vapory and undulating line which bounded the extreme limit of the marshes, suddenly assumed an exquisite flame-like purple. I was wholly absorbed in the contemplation of this picture, stamped with a truly divine grandeur, when a low, stifled voice murmured near me, "My God! how beautiful it is."

I was far from expecting this sympathetic outbreak from my young companion. I turned toward her with a warmth and surprise which did not decrease when I saw the change in her countenance, and the trembling of her lips, attesting the sincerity of her admiration.

"You confess it is beautiful!" said I.

She shook her head ; but at that moment two great tears rolled slowly down her cheeks ; she dashed them away, making an indignant gesture ; then turning suddenly to the granite cross, the base of which served her for a pedestal, she grasped it with her hands, and leaning her head firmly against it, sobbed convulsively.

I felt I ought not to interrupt, by a single word, the course of this unlooked-for emotion, and respectfully withdrew a few steps. After a moment, seeing her raise her head, and replace with a careless hand the hair that had become unfastened, I approached her.

"How ashamed I am?" she murmured.

"Be happy, rather, and cease the attempt, I pray you, to dry up the source of those tears ; it is sacred. Besides, you can never accomplish it."

"It shall be done!" cried the young girl, violently. "Besides, it is done! This fit of weeping was only an oversight. All that is beautiful, and all that is good—I wish to hate it—I do hate it!"

"And why? Good God!"

She looked me in the face, and added with a gesture of pride and inexpressible sadness, "Because I am beautiful and can never be loved."

Then, like a torrent long restrained, which has finally broken its bounds, she continued, "It is true, nevertheless!" And she put her hand on her breast. "God put in his heart all the gifts that I jeer at, that I revile every hour of the day! But when he inflicted wealth on me, he took away with one hand what he bestowed with the other! Of what good is my beauty, of what good the devotion, tenderness, enthusiasm, with which I am consumed! Ah! it is not to these attractions that the homage is rendered with which so many poltroons annoy me! I know, I know too well! and if ever some disinterested, generous, heroic soul were to love me for what I am, not for what I have—I should not believe it? Distrust always! That is my sorrow, my punishment! One thing is positive—I shall never love! I will never risk diffusing in an unworthy, venal heart the pure passion which burns in my own. I will live and die with a virgin heart in my bosom!"

"Well! I am resigned to it ; but all that is beautiful, all that one dreams of, all that speaks to me of forbidden happiness, all that rouses in me a useless love—I drive it away—I hate it!" She stopped, trembling with emotion ; then in a lower voice she resumed, "Monsieur, I have not sought for this—I have not weighed my words, I have not designed to bestow all this confidence upon you—but I have spoken ; you know all—and if I have ever wounded your sensibility, now I believe you will forgive me."

She gave me her hand. When my lips touched this soft hand, still wet with tears, it seemed to me that a mortal languor filled my veins. Marguerite turned away her head, gazed for a moment at the darkening heavens, then slowly descended the steps, saying, "Let us go."

August 20.

A LONGER but much easier road than that by which we ascended the mountain, led us into the court-yard of the farm-house, without a word being exchanged between us. Alas! what could I say? I was more open to suspicion than any one else. I felt that each word which escaped from my full heart would only increase the distance which separated me from this distrustful but adorable being.

Night had already fallen, hiding from all eyes the traces of our mutual emotion. We set out homeward. Madame Laroque fell asleep, after having again expressed the pleasure she had experienced during the day. Mlle. Marguerite, invisible and immovable in the deep shadow of the carriage, seemed to sleep, like her mother ; but when a turn of the road threw on her a ray of pale light, her open, steadfast eyes showed that she watched in silent communion with her one inconsolable thought. For myself, I can hardly say what I felt ; a strange sensation of mingled joy and grief had usurped my whole being, and I yielded to it as one yields to a dream of which one is conscious, but lacks the strength to shake off.

We arrived at home about midnight. I descended from the carriage at the entrance of the avenue, in order to reach my apartments by the shortest way across the park. As I entered a dark path, the sound of approaching steps and voices struck my ear, and I distinguished two figures in the darkness. The night was so far advanced as to justify my precaution of concealing myself in the thicket, and watching these nocturnal rambles. They passed slowly in front of me ; I recognized Mlle. Helouin leaning on M. de Bevallan's arm. At that instant the sound of the carriage wheels alarmed them, and after a warm pressure of their hands they separated hastily, Mlle.



Helouin going in the direction of the chateau, and the other towards the forest.

I returned to my room, and still reflecting on this adventure, asked myself with anger if I should allow M. de Bevallan to pursue freely his double love, and seek a wife and a mistress in the same house. Assuredly I am too much a man of my time to feel against certain weaknesses the vigorous hatred of a Puritan, and I have not the hypocrisy to affect it; but I think that the loosest morality in this respect admits some degree of dignity, elevation, and delicacy. Above all, love is its own best excuse, and M. de Bellavan's vulgar profusion of tenderness excludes all appearance of fascination and passion. Such love is not a fault; it has not even that moral value; it is the result only of calculation and of the bets laid by stupid pimps.

The various incidents of this night showed me to what an extreme degree this man was unworthy of the heart and hand he dared to covet. This union would be monstrous. And yet I instantly perceived how impossible it would be for me to thwart his designs by using the weapons chance had placed in my hands. The best end would not justify bad means, and my knowledge had not been honorably acquired. This marriage will then take place! Heaven will allow one of the noblest creatures ever made to fall into the arms of this cold libertine! It will suffer this profanation! Alas! it has suffered many such profanations!

Then I tried to conceive through what error of judgment this young girl had chosen this man. I thought I understood it. M. de Bevallan is very rich; he will bring a fortune nearly equal to that which he finds here; this seems a sort of guaranty of his sincerity; he is presumed to be more disinterested because he is less needy. Sad argument! A grievous blunder to rate characters by the degree of venality! Three-fourths of the time greediness increases with wealth—and the greatest beggars are not the poorest!

Was there not, however, some hope that Mlle. Marguerite would of herself open her eyes to the unworthiness of her choice, and find in some secret inspiration of her own heart the counsel I was prohibited from offering her? Might there not rise up in her heart a new, unlooked-for sentiment, which would blow away these vain resolves of reason, making them of no effect? Was not this feeling already alive there? Had I not received undoubted proof of it? Many of the strange caprices, the struggles, and the tears, of which I had been the object or the witness, proclaimed, without a doubt, a wavering mind, little mistress of itself. I was not so new in life as to be ignorant that a scene like that of which I chanced to be this very night the confidant and almost the accomplice—however unpremeditated it might have been, would not have burst forth in an atmosphere of indifference. Such emotions, such shocks, presuppose two souls already disturbed by a mutual tempest.

But if it were true, if she loves me, as it is only too certain that I love her, I could say of this love what she said of her beauty, "Of what good!" for I could never hope that it would have sufficient strength to triumph over the endless distrust which is the singularity and the virtue of this noble girl, a distrust of which my character would repel the injustice, but which my situation, more than any other, is made to inspire. What miracle can fill up the abyss between these terrible suspicions and the reserve they impose on me?

And, finally, if this miracle were to intervene, were she to deign to offer me a hand for which I would give my life, but which I would never ask for, would our union be happy? Ought I not to fear, sooner or later, some inexorable awakening of an ill-suppressed suspicion in this restless imagination? Could I guard myself from all painful after-thoughts, in the midst of borrowed wealth? Could I enjoy without uneasiness a love tainted with favors? Our part of protecting women is so formally imposed on us by all the sentiments

of honor, that it cannot be reversed a single instant even in all honesty, without casting upon us some shadow of doubt and suspicion. But in reality, wealth is not so great an advantage that no kind of compensation can be found in this world, and I take for granted that a man who brings to his wife, in exchange for a few bags of gold, a name that he has rendered illustrious, or great merit, or a promising future, ought not to be overpowered with gratitude; but I—I have empty hands, I have nothing more to hope from the future than of the present; of all the advantages that the world appreciates, I have only one—my title, and I should be very resolute not to bear it in order that no one could say it was the price of the bargain. In short, I should receive all, and I should give nothing; a king might marry a shepherdess, and it would be generous and charming, and one would justly congratulate him upon it, but if a shepherd were to be married to a queen, that would not make so good a figure.

I have passed the whole night in turning these things in my poor brain, or in seeking a conclusion that I have not yet found. Perhaps I ought without delay to leave this house and this country. Wisdom commands it. All this would then be at an end. What mortal trouble would one often save himself by a minute of courage and decision! I ought, at least, to be overpowered with sadness. I have never had greater occasion for it. But I am not! At the bottom of my disturbed and tortured heart there is one thought which overcomes all else, and fills me with a superhuman lightness and joy.

I see constantly, I shall always see, that little cemetery, that distant sea, that immense horizon, and that angel of beauty bathed in divine tears! I feel still her hand under my lips; I feel her tears in my eyes, in my heart! I love her! Well! to-morrow, if necessary, I will decide. Till then, let me rest. For a long time I have not misused happiness. This love—I shall die of it perhaps; let me enjoy it in peace another day!

August 26.

THIS day, this single day, that I implored, has not been granted to me. My short-lived weakness has not long awaited its expiration, nor will it soon be ended. How could I have forgotten that it was sure to come! In the moral, as in the physical order of things, there are laws that cannot be transgressed with impunity, and the certain effects of which form in this world the permanent intervention that is called Providence. A weak, but great man, who wrote with an almost foolish brain the evangel of a sage, said of these very passions, which were at once his misery, his opprobrium, and his genius, "All are good when we are their master; all are bad when we allow them to enslave us." What we are forbidden by nature is, to enlarge our affections beyond our power to control them; what reason forbids is, to wish for what we cannot obtain; conscience does not forbid us to be tempted, but to yield to temptation. It does not depend on us to have or not to have passions; but it depends on us to govern them. All the feelings that we control are legitimate; all that control us are criminal.

Let thy heart cling to that beauty only which perisheth not; let thy condition bound thy desires; let thy duties go before thy passions; extend the law of necessity to moral things; learn to give up all when virtue commands it! Yes, such is the law—I knew it; I have violated it; I am punished; nothing could be more just.

I had hardly rested for a moment in the cloud of this foolish love, than I was precipitated violently from it, and I have scarcely recovered, after five days, the necessary courage to record the circumstances of my fall. Madame Laroque and her daughter had gone to pay another visit to Madame de Saint-Cast, and to bring home Madame Aubry. I found Mlle. Helouin alone in the chateau, whither I had gone to car-

ry her her quarter's salary, for though my duties left me, in general, a stranger to the management and internal discipline of the house, the ladies had desired, out of regard for Mlle. Helouin, as well as for myself, that our salaries should pass through no hands but mine.

The young lady was seated in a little boudoir adjoining the saloon. She received me with a pensive sweetness which touched me. I possessed at that moment that fulness of heart which disposes one to confidence and good-will. I resolved, like a true Don Quixote, to extend a succoring hand to this lonely being. "Mademoiselle," I said, abruptly, "you have withdrawn your friendship from me, but mine still remains wholly yours; will you permit me to give you a proof of it?"

She looked at me, and murmured a timid "Yes."

"Well! my poor child, you will ruin yourself."

She rose hastily. "You saw me that night in the park?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"My God!" She took one step towards me. "Monsieur Maximilian, I swear to you that I am a virtuous girl."

"I believe it, Mademoiselle; but I ought to tell you that, in this little romance, very innocent, doubtless, on your part, but less so on the part of the other, you seriously risk your reputation and your peace of mind. I beg you to reflect, and I beg you, at the same time, to be assured that no one but yourself shall ever hear a word from my mouth on this subject."

I was retiring when she threw herself on her knees beside a sofa, sobbing aloud, and leaned her forehead on my hand, which she had seized. I had seen but a little while before more beautiful and more worthy tears flow; but I was moved by these. "Tell me, mademoiselle," said I, "it is not too late, is it?" She shook her head. "Well my poor child, take courage; we will save you. What can I do for you? Has that man any tokens, any letters in his hands, the restoration of which I can demand in your name? Command me as you would a brother."

She released my hand, with a look of anger. "Ah! how cruel you are!" said she. "You speak of saving me—it is you who have ruined me! After having feigned to love me, you have repulsed me; you have humiliated me; you are the sole cause of what has happened?"

"Mademoiselle, you are unjust; I have never feigned to love you; I have had a very sincere affection for you, and I have it still. I own that your beauty, your mind, and your talents, give you a perfect right to expect from those who live with you something warmer than fraternal friendship; but my position in the world, the duties which are imposed on me by my family, do not permit me to cherish any other sentiment toward you without disloyalty. I tell you frankly that I think you charming, and I assure you, that in keeping my feelings within the bounds prescribed by honesty, I have not been without merit. I see nothing in this very humiliating to you; that which should justly humiliate you is to see yourself boldly loved by a man who is determined not to marry you."

She gave me a malicious look. "What do you mean? All men are not fortune-hunters."

"Ah! you would be wicked, mischievous, Mlle. Helouin? That being the case, I have the honor to say good-by."

"Monsieur Maximilian!" she cried, placing herself before me; "pardon me! pity me! I am so unhappy! Alas! imagine what must be the feelings of a poor creature like me, who has been cruelly gifted with a heart, a soul, a mind, and whose suffering is only increased in consequence! What is my present life? and what is there for me in the future? My life is filled with the thought of my poverty, aggravated by the refinements of luxury which surround me. My future will be filled with regret, with bitter tears for even this life, this



life of slavery, odious as it is! You speak of my mind, my talents; I would I had never had abilities for anything higher than breaking stones on the road! I should be happier! I shall have spent the best part of my life in adorning another woman, in order that she might be more beautiful, more adored, and more haughty still. And when the purest of my blood shall have thus passed into the veins of this puppet, she will go to the arms of a happy husband, and bear her part in the festive scenes of life; while I, lonely, old, and abandoned, shall die in some corner with the pension of a lady's maid. What have I done to merit from Heaven such a destiny? Why I more than other women? Am I not as worthy as they? If I am wicked, it is misfortune, it is injustice, which has embittered my soul. I was born to be good, loving, charitable, like them. Ah! kindness costs so little when one is rich, and goodness is easy to the happy. If I were in their place, and they in mine, they would hate me as I hate them. One does not love his masters. What I say is horrible, is it not? I know it well. I felt my abjectness, and I blush for it! Alas! you will scorn me now more than ever, monsieur; you, whom I would have loved so well, if you would have suffered it! you, who could have restored me to all that I have lost—hope, peace, goodness, self-respect. There was a moment when I believed myself saved—when I had for the first time a thought of happiness, of pride—unfortunate that I am!

She seized both my hands, bowed down her head, and wept bitterly. "My dear child, I understand better than any one the vexation, the bitterness of your situation; but allow me to say, that you only add to it by nourishing such thoughts as you have just expressed to me. What you have said is very disagreeable; I will not conceal it from you, and you will end by meriting all the hardships of your destiny; but your imagination has greatly exaggerated it. As to the present, you are treated here, whatever you may say, as a friend; and as for the future, I see nothing which would prevent you also from quitting this house to go to the arms of a happy husband. For myself, I shall always be grateful for your affection, but I wish to say to you once more, and end the matter forever, that I have duties to fulfill, and that I neither can, nor do I wish to marry."

She suddenly looked up at me.

"Not even Marguerite?"

"I do not see that the name of Mlle. Marguerite need be brought into this discussion."

She pushed back her hair from her face with one hand, and pointing the other toward me with a threatening gesture:

"You love her!" said she, in a hoarse voice, "or rather you love her fortune, but you shall not have it."

"Mademoiselle Helouin!"

"Ah!" she replied, "you are very childish, if you think you can deceive a woman who has had the folly to love you! I read your maneuvers clearly. Besides, I know who you are—I was not far off when Mlle. de Porhoet communicated to Madame Laroque your politic confession to her."

"What! do you listen at doors, mademoiselle?"

"I care little for your insults. Besides, I can avenge them, and soon. Ah, you are very cunning, Monsieur de Champey, and I compliment you. You have acted admirably the part of disinterestedness and reserve, that your friend Laubepin recommended to you when he sent you here. He knew with whom you had to deal. He knew also the ridiculous fancy of this beautiful girl. You think her already your prey, do you not? Beautiful millions, the source of which would be very convenient to plaster up a marquise and regild an escutcheon. Well! you may renounce all hope of it, from this moment, for I promise that you shall wear your mask only one day longer, and this hand shall tear it off."

"Mademoiselle Helouin, it is quite time to put an end to this scene, for it is becoming melodramatic. You have put the game into my hands, and I could anticipate you in your own domain of accusation and calumny; but you may rest secure; I gave you my word I shall not follow you thither. I am your servant."

I left this unhappy person with a profound feeling of disgust mingled with pity. Although I had always surmised that the best endowed organizations must, in proportion to their gifts, be irritated and soured in the equivocal and mortifying position that Mlle. Helouin occupied, my imagination had never sounded the abyss of hatred now open beneath my eyes. Truly, when one thinks of it, one can hardly conceive a kind of existence which exposes a human soul to more venomous temptations, or which might be more capable of developing envy and pride in the heart; and of exasperating all the natural vanity and jealousy of woman.

It cannot be doubted that the greater part of the unfortunate girls, whose loss of fortune, or whose abilities have caused them to seek this employment, so honorable in itself, escape by the moderation of their feelings, by the firmness of their principles, or by the grace of God, the lamentable perturbations from which Mlle. Helouin had been unable to guard herself, but the test is a fearful one. As to myself, the idea had sometimes occurred to me that my sister might be compelled by our misfortunes to enter some wealthy family as a governess; I now took a vow that whatever might befall us in the future, I would sooner share with Helen the bitterest bread of labor in the poorest garret, than allow her even to seat herself at the poisoned feast of this hateful servitude.

Although I was firmly determined to leave the field open to Mlle. Helouin, and not to enter at all, into degrading recriminations, I could not see without uneasiness, the probable consequences

of the war which had been declared against me. I was evidently threatened where I was most sensitive, in my love, and in my honor. Mistress of the secret of my life, and my heart, mingling truth with falsehood with the skillfulness of her sex, Mlle. Helouin could easily present my conduct in a suspicious light, could lend to my simplest actions the color of a premeditated intrigue. It was impossible to know precisely what turn she would give to her malevolence; but I could trust to her, not to blunder in her choice of means. She knew better than any one, the weak points of those she wished to affect. She possessed over the minds of both Mlle. Marguerite and her mother the natural sway of dissimulation over frankness, of craft over candor; she enjoyed with them all the confidence which long habit and daily intimacy gave birth to, and her masters, to use her own language, had no cause to suspect, under the show of graceful good-humor and obsequious officiousness, the frenzy of pride and ingratitude which devoured this miserable soul. It was only too probable that a hand as skillful and as sure as hers would drop its poisons with entire success into the hearts thus fitted to receive them. Mlle. Helouin might fear, in yielding to her resentment, to place Mlle. Marguerite's hand in that of M. de Bevallan, and by hastening this marriage, to crush her own ambitious hopes, but I knew that a woman's hate does not calculate, but risks everything. I looked therefore for the speediest as well as the blindest vengeance on her part, and I was right.

I passed the time in painful anxiety, which I had dedicated to the sweetest thoughts. The sharpest and bitterest suffering that dependence can cause a proud spirit, that suspicion can inflict on an upright conscience, the deepest wound that scorn can give to a loving heart—I have felt it all. Adversity in my worst days had never dealt me so hard a blow.

I endeavored, however, to work as usual. Toward five o'clock I went to the chateau. The ladies had returned, and I found in the saloon Mlle. Marguerite, Madame Aubry, M. de Bevallan, and two or three other visitors. Mlle. Marguerite did not appear to perceive my entrance; she continued to converse with M. de Bevallan in an animated tone which was unusual with her. There was a question about going to an impromptu ball, which was to take place that night at a neighboring chateau. Mlle. Marguerite was going with her mother, and she urged M. de Bevallan to accompany them there; he excused himself, alleging that as he had left home before receiving the invitation, his dress was not suitable.

Mlle. Marguerite, insisting upon it with a coquettish earnestness that surprised De Bevallan himself, told him there was sufficient time for him to go home to dress, and return for them; they would keep him a good dinner. M. de Bevallan objected his carriage-horses were sick, and he could not return on horseback in ball-dress.

"Well," replied Mlle. Marguerite, "you can be driven home in the 'Americaine,' and turning toward me for the first time, with flashing eyes, 'Monsieur Odier,' said she, in a tone of command, 'go and tell them to harness it.'"

This order was so different from the style in which I was ordinarily addressed here, and to which I should be expected to submit, that the attention and curiosity of the most indifferent spectators were roused at once. There was an embarrassed silence. M. de Bevallan cast an astonished glance on Mlle. Marguerite, then looked at me, and then rose from his seat. They were disappointed if they expected an exhibition of anger from me. The insulting words addressed to me by lips so beautiful, so beloved, and so cruel, had sent a death-like coldness to my very heart. But I was never more calm. The bell which Madame Laroque used habitually to summon the domestics stood on a table within my reach; I rang it, and a servant entered immediately.

"I believe," said I to him, "that Mlle. Marguerite has some order to give you."

At these words, which she listened to with a look of stupefaction, she gave a negative shake of her head, and dismissed the servant. I would gladly have left the saloon, where I seemed to be suffocating, but I could not do so in face of the provoking attitude which M. de Bevallan had assumed.

"Upon my faith," he muttered, "this is something very singular."

I pretended not to hear him. Mlle. Marguerite said two or three words in a low voice.

"I bow to your wishes, mademoiselle," he replied, in a more elevated voice, "but I may be permitted simply to express the sincere regret that I feel at having no right to interfere here."

I rose at once. "Monsieur de Bevallan," said I, placing myself in front of him, "this regret is very superfluous, for though I have not thought it my duty to obey mademoiselle's commands, I am wholly at yours—and I shall await them!"

"Very well—very well, monsieur, nothing can be better," replied M. de Bevallan, waving his hand gracefully, to reassure the ladies.

We bowed, and I left the room. I dined alone in my tower, attended, as usual, by poor Alain, who had undoubtedly learned, through the rumors of the antechamber, all that had passed, for he constantly gave the most sorrowful looks, uttering deep sighs at intervals, and preserving, contrary to his usual custom, a dull silence, telling me only, in reply to my question, that the ladies were not going to the ball.

My short repast ended, I arranged my papers, and wrote a few words to M. Laubepin, recommending Helen to him in case of my death. The thought of her desolation in such an event grieved me deeply, but did not in the least shake my determination. I may err, but I have always thought that honor

rules over all the hierarchy of duty in our modern society. It takes the place to-day of so many virtues, half-effaced from the consciences of men, of so much half-dead faith, that it would never enter my mind to weaken its authority, to discuss its decrees, to subordinate its obligations. Honor, in its undefined character, is something superior to law and to morality. It is a religion. If we have no longer the faith of the Cross, let us preserve the faith of honor.

I expected momentarily a message from M. de Bevallan. I was preparing to go to the collector of the borough, who was a young officer who had been wounded in the Crimea, when some one knocked at my door, and M. de Bevallan himself entered. His face wore an expression of open and joyous good nature, with a slight shade of embarrassment.

"Monsieur," said he, while I looked at him with surprise, "this is an irregular proceeding; but I have rendered the State services which, God be thanked, put my courage beyond all suspicion. Besides which, I feel to-night a pleasure which leaves no room in me for hostility or rancor. And I yield to commands now more sacred to me than ever. In short, I come to offer you my hand."

I bowed gravely, and took his proffered hand.

"Now," added he, seating himself, "I can fulfill my embassy at my ease. Mlle. Marguerite gave you, in a thoughtless moment, some orders, which certainly were not in your province to receive. Your susceptibility was justly wounded, we acknowledge, and the ladies have commissioned me to express to you their deep regret. They were in despair lest this momentary error should deprive them of your good offices, of which they appreciate all the worth, and interrupt the relations between you and them, to which they attach an infinite value. For myself, monsieur, I have acquired to-night, to my great joy, the right to add my entreaties to theirs; the proposal of marriage, which I made a long time ago, is at last accepted, and I should be personally obliged to you, if you will consent not to mingle with the happy remembrances of this evening the sorrowful one of a separation, that would be prejudicial to the family into which I am about to enter."

"Monsieur," I replied, "I cannot be insensible to the tokens of good feeling which you have given me in the name of the ladies and in your own. You must excuse me from replying to them immediately by a formal decision, which requires more freedom of thought than I possess at this moment."

"Permit me at least," said M. de Bevallan, "to carry away a hope. Let us, monsieur, since the occasion presents itself, let us break through the shade of coldness which has hitherto existed between us. For my part, I am well disposed to do so. From the first, Madame Laroque, without giving up a secret which did not belong to her, apprised me that circumstances, the most honorable for you, were concealed under the air of mystery with which you surround yourself. Finally, I owe you special gratitude; I know that you were recently consulted on the subject of my pretensions to Mlle. Laroque's hand, and that I have to commend your kind appreciation of me."

"I do not think, monsieur, that I have merited—"

"Oh! I know," he replied, laughing, "that you did not overflow in my praise, but you did not say anything to my prejudice. I even think you gave evidence of real sagacity. You said that if Mlle. Marguerite were not positively happy with me, she would not be unhappy. The prophet Daniel could not have spoken better. The truth is, that the dear child would never be positively happy with any one, since she would not find in the whole world a husband who would talk to her in verse from morning till night. I am not of this sort more than any one else, I confess; but—as you have done me the honor to say of me—I am an accomplished man. I am not a wicked devil, I am a good fellow. I have faults—I have had them at least—I have loved pretty women—I cannot deny it! But what of that? It is the proof of a good heart. But I have reached port, and I am charmed, because—between ourselves—I begin to grow yellow a little. In short, I wish in future to think only of my wife and my children. Whence, I conclude, with you, that Marguerite will be perfectly happy, as much so as she can be in this world, with such a head as hers; for I will refuse her nothing, I will even anticipate her wishes. But if she were to ask me for the moon and stars, I could not go and take them down in order to be agreeable—that would be impossible. Above all, my friend, give me your hand once more."

I gave him my hand. He rose, saying, "I hope you will remain with us. See, clear your brow a little. We will make your life as pleasant as possible; but you must fall in with it a little—what the devil!—you delight in your sadness. You live, excuse me, like an owl. You are a sort of Spaniard, such as one never sees now-a-days. Why don't you crook your finger to the little Helouin? That would amuse you. She is very pretty, and—but the deuce—I forgot my promotion to high dignity. Adieu, Monsieur Maximilian, and—to-morrow—is it not?"

"To-morrow, certainly."

And this accomplished man—who is himself a sort of Spaniard, such as one sees many of—left me to my reflections.

October 1.

A SINGULAR event! Although the consequences are not the happiest to me, they have done me good. After the terrible blow which struck me, I remained as if benumbed with grief. This had at least restored me to a feeling of life, and for the first time during three long weeks, I have courage to open these leaves and resume my pen.

All possible satisfaction being given me, I thought I had no reason to quit, hastily at least, a position



and advantages which are, after all, very necessary, and for which I should have great difficulty in finding an equivalent to-day or to-morrow. The perspective of purely personal suffering that I might have to encounter, and that I have, besides, brought on myself by my own weakness, could not justify me in forsaking duties in which other interests than my own are involved. Besides, I did not wish to have Mlle. Marguerite construe my sudden retreat as vexation for the loss of a rich wife, and I made it a point of honor with myself to show her an impassible countenance, even at the altar; as to my heart, she could not see that.

I finally contented myself with writing to M. Laubepin, that certain things in my situation might at any moment become intolerable to me, and that I was desirous to obtain some employment, less remunerative, and more independent.

The next day I presented myself at the chateau, where M. de Bevallan welcomed me cordially. I saluted the ladies with as much naturalness as I could assume. It was well understood there would be no explanations. Madame Laroque seemed to me pensive and thoughtful, Mlle. Marguerite a little uncertain, but polite. As to Mlle. Helouin, she was very pale, and kept her eyes fastened on her embroidery. The poor girl had no cause to felicitate herself on the final result of her diplomacy. She would, from time to time, throw a look of scorn and menace at the triumphant M. de Bevallan; but in this stormy atmosphere, which would have disturbed a novice, M. de Bevallan breathed, moved and fluttered about with the most perfect ease. This manifestly irritated Mlle. Helouin, but it also subdued her. If she could have ruined her accomplice as well as herself, I do not doubt that she would instantly have rendered him, and with much greater right, a service analogous to that which she had done me the previous evening; but it is probable that in yielding to her jealous anger, and confessing her duplicity, she would have ruined herself only, and she had sufficient intelligence to understand that. M. de Bevallan, in truth, was not the man to commit himself with Mlle. Helouin without reserving some means of defense, and this he would use with a pitiless exposure. She resigned herself, therefore, not without finding by bitter experience, I suspect, that the weapon of treason turns sometimes in the hand which employs it.

During this day and many days following, I was subjected to a kind of torture which I had foreseen, but of which I had not calculated all the sharp details. The marriage was to take place at the end of a month. It was therefore necessary to commence preparations with all haste. Bouquets from Madame Prevost came regularly every morning. Laces, stuffs, and jewelry flowed in together, and were displayed every evening in the saloon, to the eyes of busy and envious friends. I was compelled to give my opinion and my advice upon every point. Mlle. Marguerite solicited them with cruel affectation. I would obey her commands with good grace; then I would return to my tower, and taking from a secret drawer the little tattered handkerchief, that I had saved at the peril of my life, would dry my tearful eyes with it. Faint-hearted still! But what shall I do? I love her. Perfidy, hatred, irreparable misunderstandings, separate us forever; so be it! but nothing will prevent this heart from living and dying full of her!

But a jeering demon whispered in my ear, that according to the foresight of human wisdom, Marguerite would find more peace and real happiness in the temperate friendship of a reasonable husband than she would have met with in the passionate love of a romantic spouse. Is it true? Is it possible? I do not believe it! She will have peace, be it so; but peace, after all, is not the highest word of life, the supreme symbol of happiness. If merely to escape suffering and to petrify the heart is all that is necessary in order to be happy, too many people are happy, who do not deserve to be so. By the force of reason and of prose, one ends by defaming God, and degrading his work. God gives peace to the dead, passion to the living. Yes, there is in life, by the side of vulgar and daily interests, from which I have not the childishness to pretend to escape, there is a poetry permitted, nay, commanded! It is the immortal part of the soul. It is necessary that this soul should be revealed sometimes, whether it be by storms, or tears. There is a suffering which is of more worth than happiness, or rather, which is happiness itself; it is that of a human being, who understands all the sorrows of the heart, and all the fancies of the brain, and who shares these noble torments with a sympathetic heart and a kindred mind.

Moreover, the poor child will not have even this boasted peace. That the union of two cold hearts and inert imaginations engender the repose of nothingness, I believe; but the union of life with death cannot be maintained without terrible constraint and perpetual heart-breaking.

In the midst of these grievous troubles, I found no relief except near my poor old friend, Mlle. de Porhoet. She was, or feigned to be, ignorant of the state of my heart; but in veiled allusions, perhaps involuntary, she laid her hand on my bleeding wounds with all a woman's delicacy and skill. There was, besides, in this soul, a living emblem of sacrifice and resignation, and which seemed to float above the earth, a freedom, a calmness, a sweet firmness, which diffused itself over me. I began to comprehend her innocent folly, and even to associate myself ingenuously with it. Bending over my album, I was cloistered with her for long hours in her cathedral, and I breathed there, at moments, the vague perfume of an ideal serenity.

In proportion as the fatal day approached, Mlle. Marguerite lost the feverish vivacity which had

animated her since the marriage had been decided on. She fell at intervals into her former familiar attitude of passive indolence and sober reverie. Two or three times I surprised her looking at me with an air of extraordinary perplexity. Madame Laroque, too, on her part, often regarded me with an expression of anxiety and indecision, as if she desired and at the same time dreaded to approach some painful subject of conversation. The day before yesterday I chanced to be alone with her in the saloon, Mlle. Helouin having gone to transmit some order. The indifferent conversation in which we were engaged ceased at once as if by some secret accord. "Monsieur," said Madame Laroque in a penetrating voice, "you choose very unwisely to whom to tell your secrets."

"My secrets, madame! I cannot understand you. No one here except Mlle. de Porhoet has ever heard from me a breath of my secrets."

"Alas!" she replied, "I wish to believe it—I do believe it; but that is not enough!"

At this moment Mlle. Helouin re-entered, and nothing more was said.

The next day—that is, yesterday—I set out on horseback early in the morning to oversee the felling of some timber in the neighborhood. I was returning toward four o'clock in the direction of the chateau, when at a sharp turn of the road, I found myself face to face with Mlle. Marguerite. She was alone. I bowed, and was about to pass, but she stopped her horse.

"A beautiful autumn day, monsieur," said she.

"Yes, mademoiselle. You are going to ride?"

"As you see, I am using my last moments of independence, and even abusing them, for I feel a little troubled by my solitude. But Alain was wanted down there—my poor Mervyn is lame. You do not wish to replace him by chance?"

"With pleasure. Where are you going?"

"Why—I had the idea of pushing my ride as far as the tower of Elven." She pointed with the end of her riding-whip to a dark summit which rose within sight of the road. "I think," she added, "that you have never made this pilgrimage."

"It is true. It has often tempted me, but I have put it off till now, I hardly know why."

"Well! it is easily found; but it is already late, and we must make a little haste, if you please."

I turned my horse's head, and we set out at a gallop.

As we rode I sought to explain to myself this unexpected whim, which I could not but think premeditated. I concluded that time and reflection had weakened in Mlle. Marguerite's mind the first impressions made by the calumnies which had been poured into her ear. She had apparently ended by doubting Mlle. Helouin's veracity, and had contrived to offer me, by chance, under a disguised form, a kind of reparation which might possibly be due me.

In the midst of the thoughts that besieged me I attached slight importance to the particular end we proposed ourselves to in this strange ride. I had often heard this tower of Elven spoken of as one of the most interesting ruins of the country, and I had never traveled over either of the two roads which lead from Rennes, or from Jocelyn, toward the sea, without contemplating with an eager eye, that uncertain mass which one sees towering upward in the middle of distant heaths like an enormous stone bank; but time and occasion had been wanting to me.

The village of Elven that we traversed, slackening our pace a little, gave a striking representation of a town of the Middle Ages. The form of the low, dark houses has not changed for five or six centuries. One thinks himself dreaming, when he sees through the large gaps, arched, and without sashes, which take the place of windows in the houses, these groups of women with wild eyes, spinning from distaffs in the shade, and conversing in low voices in an unknown language. It seemed as if all these grayish specters had quitted their monumental slabs to enact some scene of another age, of which we were to be the sole living witnesses. The little life that was visible in the single street of the village bore the same character of antiquity and faithful representation of a vanished world.

A little distance beyond Elven we took a cross-road, which led us up a barren hill; we saw from its summit, although at some distance from us, the feudal ruin overlooking a wooded height in front of us. The heath where we were, descended sharply toward marshy meadows, surrounded with thick young woods. We descended the slope and were soon in the woods. There we took a narrow road, the rough, unbroken pavement of which resounded loudly under our horses' feet. I had ceased for some time to see the tower of Elven, the locality of which I could not even conjecture, when it rose out of the foliage a few steps before us, with the suddenness of an apparition. This tower is not decayed; it has preserved its original height, which exceeds a hundred feet, and the regular layers of granite, which compose this magnificent octagonal structure, give it the aspect of a formidable block, cut yesterday by the purest chisel. Nothing more imposing, more proud and somber, can be imagined than this old donjon, impassible to the effects of time, and alone in these thick woods. The trees have grown close to its walls, and their tops reach to the openings for the lower windows. This growth of vegetation conceals the base of the edifice, and increases its appearance of fantastic mystery. In this solitude, surrounded by forests, and with this mass of extraordinary architecture in front of us, it was impossible not to think of enchanted castles, where beautiful princesses sleep a hundred years.

"Up to this time," said Mlle. Marguerite, to whom I tried to communicate this idea, "I have seen no more

than what we now see; but if you wish to wake the princess, we can enter. As far as I know, there may be in the neighborhood a shepherd or shepherdess, who is furnished with a key. Let us fasten our horses and seek for them—you for the shepherd, and I for the shepherdess."

The horses were accordingly fastened in a little enclosure near the ruin, and we separated for a moment to search around the castle. But we had the vexation to meet neither shepherd nor shepherdess. Our desire to see the interior naturally increased with all the force of attraction which forbidden fruit has for us, and we crossed a bridge thrown over the moat at a venture. To our great satisfaction, the massive door of the donjon was not shut; we needed only to push it open in order to enter a corner, dark and encumbered with rubbish, which was probably the place for the body-guard in former times; from thence we passed into a vast circular hall, the chimney-piece of which still showed, on its coat of arms, the besants of the crusade; a large open window traversed by the symbolic cross, plainly cut in the stone, lighted distinctly the lower part of this room, while the eyes failed to pierce the uncertain shadows of the lofty, broken roof. At the sound of our steps an invisible flock of birds flew out from the darkness, shaking down upon us the dust of centuries.

On mounting up the granite steps, ranged one above the other round the hall, into the embrasure of the window, we could overlook the deep moat and the ruined parts of the fortress; but we had noticed on our entrance a flight of steps cut in the thick wall, and we felt a childish impatience to push our discoveries further. We, therefore, undertook to ascend this rude staircase; I led the way and Mlle. Marguerite followed bravely, holding up her long skirts as well as she could. From the top of the flat roof the view was vast and delicious. The soft tints of twilight were creeping over the ocean of half-golden autumn foliage, the dark marshes, and the green mossy ground near us, and the distant ranges of hills mingling with and crossing each other. As we gazed down upon this melancholy landscape, infinite in extent, we felt the peace of solitude, the silence of evening, the sadness of the past descend into our hearts.

This charm was increased, for me at least, by the presence of a beloved being; all who have loved will comprehend this. This hour even of mutual contemplation and emotion, of pure and profound enjoyment, was, without doubt, the last that would be given me to pass near her and with her, and I clung to it with a sad earnestness. For Marguerite, I know not what passed within her; she was seated on the ledge of the parapet, gazing silently at the distance. I heard only the sound of her quickened breath.

I do not know how long we remained thus. When the mists spread over the low meadows, and the far-off hills became indistinct in the increasing darkness, Marguerite rose. "Let us go," said she, in a low voice, as if the curtain had fallen on some regretted pageant; "it is finished!" Then she began to descend the staircase and I followed her.

When we attempted to leave the castle, to our great surprise we found the door closed. Apparently the young keeper, ignorant of our presence, had turned the key while we were on the roof. Our first impression was that of gayety. It was actually an enchanted castle! I made vigorous efforts to break the enchantment; but the enormous bolt of the old lock was solidly fastened in the granite, and I was compelled to give up the attempt to unfasten it. I then attacked the door itself; the massive hinges and the oak panels, banded with iron, resisted all my strength. Two or three pieces of rough stone that I found amongst the rubbish and that I threw against this insuperable obstacle to our egress, had no other result than to shake the roof, fragments of which fell at my feet. Mlle. Marguerite, would not allow me to pursue an enterprise so evidently hopeless, and which was not without danger. I then ran to the window, and shouted for help, but nobody replied. During the next ten minutes I repeated these cries constantly, but with the same lack of success. We then employed the remaining daylight in exploring minutely the interior of the castle, but we could discover no place of egress except the door, as solid as the wall to us, and the great window, thirty feet above the bottom of the moat.

Night had now fallen over the country, and darkness invaded the old castle. Some rays of moonlight penetrated the window, and fell upon the stone steps beneath it. Mlle. Marguerite, who had gradually lost all appearance of sprightliness, ceased to reply to the conjectures, reasonable or otherwise, with which I endeavored to dispel her anxiety. She sat in the shadow of the window, silent and immovable, but I was in the full light of the moon on the step nearest the window, at intervals sending forth a cry of distress; but in truth the more uncertain the success of my efforts became, the more an irresistible feeling of joyfulness seized upon me. I saw suddenly realized the endless and most impossible dream of lovers; I was alone in a desert with the woman whom I loved! For long hours there was only she and I in the world, only her life and mine! I thought of all the marks of sweet protection, of tender respect, that I should have the right, the duty to lavish upon her; I pictured her fears calmed, her confidence, her sleep; I said to myself that this fortunate night, if it did not give me the love of this dear girl, would at least assure to me her most lasting esteem.

As I abandoned myself with all the egotism of passion to my secret ecstasy, some reflection of which was perhaps painted on my face, I was suddenly roused by these words, addressed to me in the tone of affected tranquility: "Monsieur le Marquis



de Champcey, have there been many cowards in your family before you?"

I rose, but fell back again upon my stone seat, turning a stupefied look in the direction where I saw the vague outline of the young girl. One idea alone occurred to me, a terrible idea, that fear and anxiety had affected her brain—that she was becoming crazy.

"Marguerite!" I cried, without knowing even that I spoke. This word completed her irritation, doubtless.

"My God! How odious he is! What a coward! Yes, I repeat it, what a coward!"

The truth began to dawn upon me. I descended one of the steps. "Well, what is the matter?" said I, coldly.

"It is you," she replied with vehemence, "you who have bribed this man—or this child—to imprison us in this tower. To-morrow I shall be lost—dishonored in public opinion and I can belong only to you—such is your calculation, is it not? But this plan, I assure you, will not succeed better than the others. You know me very imperfectly if you think I shall not prefer dishonor, a convent, death—all to the disgrace of uniting my hand, my life, to yours. And when this infamous ruse had succeeded, when I had had the weakness—as certainly I shall not have—to give you my person, and what is of more importance to you, my fortune—in return for this beautiful stroke of policy. What kind of a man are you? To wish for wealth, and a wife, acquired at such a price as this? Ah, thank me still, monsieur, for not yielding to your wishes; they are impudent, believe me, for if ever shame and public derision shall drive me into your arms, I should have so much contempt for you that I should break your heart! Yes, were it as hard, as cold as stone, I would draw tears of blood from it."

"Mademoiselle," said I, with all the calmness I could assume, "I beg you to recover yourself, your reason. I assure you, upon my honor, that you insult me. Will you please to reflect? Your suspicions have no probable foundation. I could not have possibly arranged the base treachery of which you accuse me, and how have I given you the right to believe me capable of it?"

"All that I know of you gives me this right," cried she, cutting the air with her riding-whip. "I will tell you for once what has been in my soul for a long time. You came to our house under a borrowed name and character. We were happy, we were tranquil, my mother and I. You have brought us trouble, disorder, anxiety, to which we were before strangers. In order to attain your end, to repair the loss of your fortune, you have usurped our confidence—you have been reckless of our repose—you have played with our purest, truest, most sacred feelings. You have broken our hearts, without pity. That is what you have done—or wished to do—it matters little which. I am very weary of it all, I assure you. And when, at this hour, you come and pledge me your honor as a gentleman, I have the right not to believe it—and I do not believe it!"

I was beside myself; I seized both her hands in a transport of vehemence, which controlled her! "Marguerite, my poor child, listen! I love you, it is true, and never did love more ardent, more disinterested, more holy, enter into the heart of man. But you also, you love me; you love me, unfortunate! and you kill me! You speak of a bruised and broken heart. Ah! what have you done with mine? But it is yours; I leave it with you. As to my honor, I will keep it—it is untouched. And soon I will force you to acknowledge it. And upon this honor, I swear to you, that, if I die, you will weep for me; that, if I live, never, adored as you are—were you on your knees before me—never will I marry you, till you are as poor as I, or I as rich as you! And now pray; ask God for miracles, it is time!"

I pushed her away from the embrasure of the window, and sprung upon the upper step; I had conceived a desperate plan, and I executed it with the precipitation of actual madness. As I have before said, the tops of the beeches and oaks, growing in the moat, reached the level of the window. With the aid of my bent riding-whip, I drew toward me the extremity of the nearest branches; I seized them on a venture, and leaped into space; I heard above my head my name, "Maximilian!" uttered suddenly, with a distracted cry. The branches to which I was clinging bent with their whole length toward the abyss; then there was a crashing sound; the tree broke under my weight, and I fell heavily to the ground.

The muddy nature of the earth lessened the violence of the shock; for though I was wounded, I was not killed. One of my arms had struck against the sloping masonry of the tower, and I suffered such sharp pain in it that I fainted. I was aroused by Marguerite's frightened voice: "Maximilian! Maximilian! For pity's sake! In the name of the good God, speak to me! Forgive me!"

I rose, I saw her in the opening of the window, in the full moonlight, with her head bare, her hair disheveled, her hand grasping the arm of the cross, and her eyes earnestly fixed upon the ground below.

"Fear nothing," said I to her. "I am not hurt. Only be patient an hour or two. Give me time to go to the chateau; it is the surest. Be certain that I will keep your secret, that I will save your honor as I have saved mine."

I got out of the moat with difficulty, and went to mount my horse. I suspended my left arm, which was wholly useless and very painful, with my handkerchief. Thanks to the light of the moon, I easily found my way back, and an hour later I reached the chateau. I was told Doctor Desmarests was in the

saloon; I went in at once, and found there some dozen persons, whose countenances wore an expression of anxiety and alarm.

"Doctor," said I, gayly, on entering, "my horse took fright at his own shadow, and threw me on the road, and I am afraid my left arm is sprained. Will you see?"

"How, sprained!" said M. Desmarests, after unfastening the handkerchief. "Your arm is broken, my poor boy."

Madame Laroque gave a little cry, and approached me. "This is then a night of misfortune," said she.

I feigned surprise. "What else has happened?" I cried.

"Mon Dieu! I fear some accident has happened to my daughter. She went out on horseback at three o'clock, and it is now eight, and she has not yet returned."

"Mademoiselle Marguerite? Why I saw her—"

"How? Where? At what time? Forgive me, monsieur; it is the egotism of a mother."

"I saw her about five o'clock on the road. We met. She told me she thought of riding as far as the tower of Elven."

"The tower of Elven! She must be lost in the woods. We ought to go there promptly. Let orders be given."

M. de Bevallan at once ordered horses to be brought out. I affected a wish to join the cavalcade, but Madame Laroque and the doctor positively prohibited it, and I allowed myself to be easily persuaded to seek my bed, of which, in truth, I felt great need.

Doctor Desmarests, after having applied a first dressing to my injured arm, took a seat in the carriage with Madame Laroque, who went to the village of Elven, to wait there the result of the diligent search that M. de Bevallan would direct in the neighborhood of the tower.

It was nearly ten o'clock when Alain came to announce to me that Mlle. Marguerite was found. He recounted the history of her imprisonment, without omitting any details, save, be it understood, those which the young girl and I would alone know. The account of the adventure was soon confirmed by the doctor, then by Madame Laroque herself, and I had the satisfaction to see that no suspicion of the exact truth entered the mind of any one.

I have passed the night in repeating, with the most fatiguing perseverance, and with the oddest complications of fever and dreams, my dangerous leap from the old tower window. I cannot become accustomed to it. At each instant the sensation of falling through space rises to my throat, and I awake breathless. At length the day dawned, and I became calmer. At eight o'clock Mlle. de Porhoet came and installed herself by my bedside, her knitting in her hand. She has done the honors of my room to the visitors, who have succeeded each other all the day. Madame Laroque came first after my old friend. As she held with a long pressure the hand I had extended to her, I saw two large tears roll down her cheeks. Has she then been taken into her daughter's confidence?

Mlle. de Porhoet has informed me that M. Laroque has kept his bed since yesterday. He has had a slight attack of paralysis. To-day he cannot speak, and his state causes great anxiety. It has been decided to hasten the marriage. M. Laubepin has been sent for from Paris; he is expected to-morrow, and the marriage contract will be signed the day following, under his supervision.

I have sat up some hours this evening, but if I am to believe M. Desmarests, I am wrong to write with my fever, and I am a great blockhead.

October 3.

It really seems as if some malign power took the trouble to devise the most singular and the cruellest temptations and to offer them by turns to my conscience and my heart! M. Laubepin not having arrived this morning, Madame Laroque asked me for some information which she needed in order to determine upon the preamble of the contract which, as I have said, is to be signed to-morrow. As I am condemned to keep my room for several days longer, I begged Madame Laroque to send me the titles and private papers which were in the possession of her father-in-law, and which were indispensable to me in order to solve the difficulties that had been pointed out.

They soon brought me two or three drawers filled with them that had been secretly taken out of M. Laroque's cabinet while the old man was asleep, for he had always shown himself very jealous of his private papers. In the first which I took up the repetition of my own family name caught my eye, and appealed to my curiosity with irresistible force. This is the literal text of the paper:

"TO MY CHILDREN.

"The name that I bequeath to you and that I have honored, is not my own. My father's name was Savage. He was manager of a plantation of considerable size in the island, at that time belonging to France, of Saint-Lucie, owned by a wealthy and noble family of Dauphiny, that of the Champeys d'Hauterives. My father died in 1793, and I inherited, although still quite young, the confidence they had placed in him. Toward the close of that sad year, the French Antilles were taken by the English, or were delivered up to them by the insurgent colonists. The Marquis de Champey d'Hauterive (Jacques-Auguste), whom the orders of the Convention had not then attained, commanded at that time the frigate *Thetis*, which had cruised in these waters for three years.

"A large number of French colonists scattered through the Antilles had acquired large fortunes

with the loss of which they were now daily threatened. They contrived, with the aid of Commandant Champey, to organize a flotilla of light transports, to which they transferred all their movable property, hoping to return to their native land, protected by the guns of the *Thetis*. I had long before received orders to sell the plantation which I had managed since my father's death, at any price, in view of the impending troubles. On the night of the 14th of November, 1793, I secretly quitted Saint-Lucie, already occupied by the enemy, alone in a boat from Cape Mome-au-Sable. I carried with me the sum for which I had sold the plantation, in English bank notes and guineas. M. de Champey, thanks to the minute knowledge he had gained of these coasts, had been able to elude the English cruisers, and had taken refuge in the difficult and obscure channel of the Gros-Ilet. He had ordered me to join him there this very night, and only waited my coming on board before issuing from the channel with the flotilla under his escort, and heading for France. On the way thither, I had the misfortune to fall into the hands of the English. My captors, masters in treachery as they are, gave me the choice to be shot immediately, or to sell them, by means of the million which I had in my possession, and which they would abandon to me, the secret of the channel where the flotilla lay. I was young, the temptation was too strong; a half hour later the *Thetis* was sunk, the flotilla taken, and M. de Champey grievously wounded. A year passed, a sleepless year. I became mad, and I resolved to revenge myself on the accursed English, for the torments which racked me. I went to Guadeloupe, I changed my name, and devoting the greater part of the price of my treason to the purchase of an armed brig, I fell upon the English. For fifteen years, I washed in their blood and my own the stain I had made, in an hour of weakness, on my country's flag. Although more than three-fourths of my real fortune has been acquired in glorious battles, its origin is none the less, as I have stated.

"On my return to France, in my old age, I inquired into the situation of the Champeys d'Hauterives; they were happy and rich. I continued, therefore, to hold my peace. May my children forgive me! I could not gain courage to blush before them while I live; but my death will reveal this secret to them; they will use it according to the inspiration of their consciences. For myself, I have only one prayer to make to them; there will be, sooner or later, a final war between France and her opposite neighbor; we hate each other too much; we must ruin them, or they will ruin us! If this war breaks out during the lifetime of my children or my grandchildren, I desire that they shall present to the government a corvette, armed and equipped, on the sole condition that she shall be named the *Savage*, and be commanded by a Breton. At every broadside that she sends on the Carthaginian shore my bones will shake with pleasure in my grave!"

"RICHARD SAVAGE, called LAROQUE."

The recollections that were roused in my mind, on reading this dreadful confession, confirmed its correctness. I had heard my father, twenty times, relate, with a mixture of pride and sorrow, the incident in my grandfather's life which was here spoken of. Only it was believed in my family that Richard Savage was the victim, and not the actor, in the treason which had betrayed the commander of the *Thetis*.

I now understood all that had struck me as singular in the old sailor, and in particular his timid bearing toward me. My father had always told me that I was the living portrait of my grandfather, the Marquis Jacques; and without doubt some glimmering of this resemblance penetrated occasionally his clouded brain, and even reached the unquiet conscience of the poor old man.

Hardly was I master of this secret, when I fell into a terrible quandary. I could not feel animosity against this man, whose temporary loss of moral strength had been expiated by a long life of repentance, and by a passionate despair and hatred which was not wanting in grandeur. I could not recognize, without a kind of admiration, the savage spirit which still animated these lines, written by a culpable but heroic hand.

But what ought I do with this terrible secret? The first thought which occurred to me was, that it would destroy all obstacles between Mlle. Marguerite and me; that henceforth this fortune, which had separated us, would be an almost obligatory bond between us, since I alone, of all the world, could render it legitimate, in sharing it with her. In truth, the secret was not mine; and although the most innocent of chances had revealed it to me, strict probity demanded, perhaps, that I should leave it to reach, in its own good time, the hands for which it was intended: out in waiting for this moment, that which was irreparable would have taken place—and I should allow it when I could prevent it by a single word! And these poor women themselves, when the day came for the fatal truth to make them blush, would, perhaps share my sorrow, my despair! They would be the first to cry to me, "Ah! if you knew it why did you not speak?"

Well, no! neither to-day, nor to-morrow, nor ever, if I can help it, shall those noble faces blush with shame. I will not purchase my happiness at the price of their humiliation. This secret, known only to me, which this old man, henceforth mute forever, cannot betray—this secret exists no longer—the flames have devoured it!

I had considered it well. I know what I have dared to do. It was a will—a testament—and I have destroyed it! Moreover, it would not have benefited me alone. My sister, who is confided to my care,



would have gained a fortune through it—and, without her consent, I have thrust her back into poverty with my own hand. I know all that. But two pure, elevated, proud souls will not be crushed and blighted by the weight of a crime which was foreign to them. There is here a principle of equity which seemed to me superior to all literal justice. If I have committed a crime, in my turn I will answer for it! But this inward struggle has wearied me. I can write no longer.

October 4.

M. LAUBEPIN arrived at length this evening. He came for a moment only, to speak to me. He was abstracted, abrupt and dissatisfied. He spoke to me very briefly of the proposed marriage: "A very happy operation," said he; "a praiseworthy union in all respects, where nature and society both find the guaranties that they have a right to demand on such an occasion. Upon which, young man, I wish you a good-night, and I will go and clear the ticklish grounds of the preliminary articles, in order that the car of this interesting Hymen may reach its destination without jolting."

The contract is to be signed at one o'clock to-day, in the saloon in the presence of friends, and the customary attendants. I cannot be present at the ceremony, and I bless my injury, which has saved me from enduring this torture.

I was writing to my little Helen, to whom I shall endeavor for the future to devote all my thoughts, when M. Laubepin and Mlle. de Porhoet entered my room. M. Laubepin had not failed to appreciate the many virtues of my venerable friend during his frequent visits to Laroque, and a warm, respectful attachment has existed for a long time between these two old people. After an interminable exchange of ceremonies, salutations and bows, they took the seats I had prepared for them, and began to look at me with an air of great beatitude.

"Well," said I, "it is ended!"

"It is ended!" they replied, in concert.

"Has everything gone on well?"

"Very well," said Mlle. de Porhoet.

"Excellent!" added M. Laubepin. Then, after a pause, "That Bevallan is gone to the devil!"

"And young Helouin is on the same road," added Mlle. de Porhoet.

I uttered an exclamation of surprise: "Good God, what does all this mean?"

"My friend," said M. Laubepin, "the proposed union presented all the advantages desirable, and it would have secured, undoubtedly, the mutual happiness of the parties, if marriage were a purely commercial association; but it is not so. My duty in these interesting circumstances was, since my assistance was demanded, to consult the inclination of the hearts, and the suitability of the characters, as well as the proportion of the fortunes. But I perceived from the first that the marriage in question had the inconvenience not to exactly please any one, neither my excellent friend, Madame Laroque, nor the amiable bride, nor the clearest-sighted friends of these ladies; nobody, in short, unless it were the bridegroom, about whom I cared very little. It is true (this remark is due to Mlle. de Porhoet), it is true, I said to myself, that the bridegroom is gentle—"

"A gentleman, if you please," interrupted Mlle. de Porhoet, in a stern voice.

"Gentleman," returned M. Laubepin, accepting the amendment; "but it is a kind of gentleman which does not please me."

"Neither does it please me," said Mlle. de Porhoet. "He was one of the buffoons of his species, and resembled those mannerless grooms that we saw in the last century, issue from the English stables, under the management of the Duc de Chartres, as a prelude to the revolution."

"Oh! If they had done nothing but act as a prelude to the revolution, one could forgive them," said M. Laubepin.

"I ask a thousand pardons, my dear sir; but speak for yourself. Besides, there is no need of discussing that; will you continue?"

"Therefore," resumed M. Laubepin, "seeing that all were going to these nuptials as to a funeral, I sought for some means, both honorable and legal, not to break our faith with M. de Bevallan, but to induce him to withdraw from the marriage. This was the more allowable, because, in my absence, M. de Bevallan had taken advantage of the inexperience of my friend Madame Laroque, and the softness of my confrere from Rennes, in order to secure himself most exorbitant interests. Without departing from the letter of the articles agreed on, I succeeded in sensibly modifying their spirit. However, honor and the promises given imposed bounds I could not break. The contract, in spite of all I could do, remained quite as advantageous as any man could accept, who possessed the least nobleness of soul, and tenderness for his future wife. Was M. de Bevallan this man? We must risk the chance of that. I confess to you that I was not unmoved when I began the reading this morning of this irrevocable instrument, before an imposing audience."

"For myself," interrupted mademoiselle, "I had not a drop of blood in my veins. The first part gave so fine a portion to the enemy, that I gave up all for lost."

"Without doubt, mademoiselle; but, as we say, the venom is in the tail, in cauda venenum. It was pleasant, my friend, to see the faces of M. de Bevallan and that of my colleague from Rennes, who was present, when I abruptly unmasked my batteries. They looked at each other in silence at first, then they whispered together, and finally they rose, and approaching the table before which I was seated, asked, in a low voice, for explanations."

"Speak aloud, if you please, gentlemen," said I

to them, "there is no need of mystery here. What do you wish?"

"The spectators began to attend to the conversation. M. de Bevallan, without raising his voice, insinuated that this contract was a suspicious work."

"A suspicious work!" I replied, in as loud a voice as possible. "What do you mean by that? Is it against Madame Laroque, against me, or against my colleague here present, that you direct this strange imputation?"

"Chut! silence! no noise!" said the notary from Rennes, in a prudent tone; "but, see; it was agreed from the first that the marriage settlement should be dispensed with—"

"The marriage settlement, sir? And where did you find any question of a marriage settlement?"

"Come, brother, you know very well that you restore the marriage settlement by a subterfuge."

"Subterfuge, brother! Permit me, as your senior, to advise you to erase that word from your vocabulary."

"But, really," muttered M. de Bevallan, "my hands are tied on all sides; I am treated like a little boy."

"How, monsieur? What are we doing here according to you? Is this a contract or a will? You forget that Madame Laroque is living, that her father-in-law is living, that you are marrying, not inheriting—not yet, at least, monsieur; have a little patience; what the deuce—"

"At these words Mlle. Marguerite rose. 'That is enough,' said she. 'Monsieur Laubepin, throw the contract into the fire. Mother, return the gentleman his presents.' Then she left the room with the step of an insulted queen. Madame Laroque followed her. At the same moment I threw the contract into the fireplace."

"Monsieur," said M. de Bevallan to me, in a threatening tone, "there is some maneuver here, of which I will learn the secret."

"I will tell it to you," I replied to him. "A young person who has a just pride in herself, had conceived the fear that your wooing was addressed solely to her fortune; she no longer doubts it. I have the honor to wish you a good-day."

"From him I went to find the two ladies, who, on my faith threw their arms around my neck. A quarter of an hour afterward M. de Bevallan quitted the chateau with my colleague from Rennes. His departure and his disgrace had the inevitable result of unloosing the tongues of the domestics, and his impudent intrigue with Mlle. Helouin was soon known. The young woman, suspected for some time past in other respects, asked for her dismissal, and it was not refused her. It is needless to add that the ladies will secure her a comfortable support. Well, my lad, what do you say to all this? Are you suffering more? You are as pale as a dead man."

The truth is, that this unlooked-for news had given rise to such a crowd of happy and painful feelings that I nearly fainted.

M. Laubepin, who was to set out on his return the next morning at sunrise, came this evening to say good-by. After a few embarrassed words between us, he said: "There, my dear child, I am not going to question you as to what has taken place here; but if, by chance, you need a confidant and a counselor, I ask your preference."

I could not unbosom myself to a more trusty friend. I gave the worthy old man a detailed account of all the circumstances affecting my relations with Mlle. Marguerite since my arrival at the chateau. I even read him some pages of this journal in order to show him more precisely the state of those relations and the state of my feelings. And, finally, the secret that I had discovered the preceding day among the papers of M. Laroque; I concealed nothing from him.

When I had ended, M. Laubepin, whose face had become very thoughtful and anxious, replied, "It is useless to disguise from you that in sending you hither I meditated a union between you and Mlle. Laroque. All went at first according to my wishes. Your hearts, which in my opinion are worthy of each other, seemed to approach insensibly; but this strange adventure of which Elven was the romantic theater, entirely disconcerts me, I acknowledge. What the deuce, my friend, to leap from the window at the risk of breaking your neck; this was, let me tell you, sufficient proof of your disinterestedness; it was quite superfluous to add to this honorable proceeding the solemn oath never to marry this poor child, except in contingencies which we cannot possibly hope for. I pride myself on being a man of resources, but I own I am incapable of giving you two hundred thousand francs a year or of taking them away from Mlle. Laroque!"

"Well, sir, give me your counsel. I have more confidence in you than in myself, for I feel that misfortune, by constantly exposing me to suspicion, has roused in me the sensitiveness of honor even to excess. Speak. Will you tell me to forget the unwise but still solemn oath which, at this moment, alone separates me, I believe, from the happiness you have dreamed of for your adopted son?"

M. Laubepin rose and paced the room for some minutes, with his thick eyebrows drawn down over his eyes; then stopped, and seizing my hand, "Young man," said he, "it is true I love you as my own child; but, were your heart to break and mine with yours, I cannot trifle with my principles. It is better to exceed the demands of honor than to fall short of them; in the matter of oaths, all those which are not exacted at the point of the sword, or at the mouth of a pistol, should be either not taken, or if taken, should be kept. Such is my opinion."

"It is also mine. I will leave here to-morrow with you."

"No, Maximilian, remain here a little while longer. I do not believe in miracles, but I believe in God,

who rarely suffers us to perish through our virtues. Give Providence a little time. I know that what I ask will require great resolution, but I claim it formally of your friendship. If, in a month, you do not receive any news from me—well, you shall leave."

He embraced me, and left me with a peaceful conscience but a desolate heart.

October 12.

It is now two days since I left my retreat and went to the chateau. I had not seen Mlle. Marguerite since the moment of our separation in the tower of Elven. She was alone in the saloon when I entered there; on recognizing me she made an involuntary movement as if to withdraw; then she remained immovable, her face becoming crimson. This was contagious, for I felt myself flush to the very roots of my hair.

"How do you do, monsieur?" said she, holding out her hand, and pronouncing these simple words in a voice so soft, so humble—alas! so tender—that I could hardly restrain myself from kneeling before her. But I replied in a tone of cold politeness. She looked sadly at me, then cast down her large eyes and resumed her work.

At that moment her mother sent for her to come to her grandfather, whose state had become very alarming. He lost his voice and all power of motion several days previous, the paralysis having attacked his whole body; the last glimmerings of intellectual life were also extinguished; sensibility alone contended with disease. No one could doubt that the old man drew near his end; but his energetic heart had so strong a hold on life, that the struggle promised to be a long and obstinate one. From the first appearance of danger, however, Madame Laroque and her daughter had been lavish of their strength, watching beside him day and night with passionate abnegation and earnest devotion which are the special virtue and glory of their sex. But they succumbed to fatigue and fever on the night before last; we offered, M. Desmarests and I, to supply their places beside M. Laroque during the night. They consented to take a few hours' repose.

The doctor, very tired himself, soon announced to me that he was going to lie down in the adjoining room. "I am of no use here," said he; "the matter is decided. You see he suffers no longer, the poor old man! He is in a state of lethargy, which has nothing disagreeable in it; he will awake only to die. Therefore you can be easy. If you remark any change, you will call me; but I do not think this will be before to-morrow. In the meantime I am dead with sleep!" and yawning aloud, he left the room. His language, his bearing in the presence of a dying man, shocked me. He was an excellent man, however; but in order to render to death the respect which is due, it is necessary to believe in an immortal principle which it sets free, not to see merely the brute matter which it dissolves.

Left alone in the sick-room, I seated myself near the foot of the bed, the curtains of which had been raised, and tried to read by the light of a lamp that stood near me on a little table. The book fell from my hands: I could think only of the singular combination of events which gave to this old man the grandson of his victim, as a witness and protector of his last sleep. Then, in the midst of the profound quiet of the hour and the place, I conjured up the scenes of tumult and violence, of which this life, now about to close, had been so full. I sought for some dim impression of them on the face of the sufferer, but I saw there only the heaviness and premature repose of death. I approached his pillow at intervals, to assure myself that the vital breath still moved in his sinking breast.

At length, toward the middle of the night, an irresistible torpor seized me, and I fell asleep, my forehead leaning on my hand. I was suddenly awakened by some mournful sound; I raised my eyes, and I felt a shivering in the very marrow of my bones. The old man was half-risen in his bed, and had fixed upon me an attentive, astonished look in which shone a life and intelligence that, up to this time, I had never beheld in him. When my eye met his he trembled; he stretched out his crossed arms, and said to me in a supplicating voice, the strange, unusual sound of which suspended the very beating of my heart:

"Monsieur le Marquis, forgive me!"

I tried to rise, I tried to speak, but in vain. I sat in my chair like one petrified.

After a silence, during which the eyes of the dying man had not ceased to plead to me, he again spoke:

"Monsieur le Marquis, deign to forgive me!"

I found power at last to go to him. As I approached, he shrunk backward, as if to escape some dreadful contact. I raised one hand and lowering it gently before his eyes, which were distended and wild with terror, I said to him:

"Go in peace, I forgive you."

I had not finished speaking these words, when his withered face became illuminated with a flash of joy and youth, and a tear flowed from each sunken eye. He extended one hand toward me, but suddenly clenched it, waving it threateningly in the air; I saw his eyeballs roll as if a ball had been sent to his heart—"The English," he murmured, and fell back upon the pillow, an inert mass. He was dead.

I called aloud quickly; attendants came running in. He was soon surrounded by prayers and pious tears. I withdrew, deeply moved by this extraordinary scene, which would forever remain a secret between myself and the dead.

This sad family event had caused numerous duties and cares to devolve upon me, which have justified in my own eyes my prolonged stay at the chateau.



It is impossible to conjecture what could have been M. Laubepin's motives in counseling me to defer my departure. What can he hope from this delay? It seems to me that he yielded in this case to a feeling of vague superstition and puerility, to which a mind tempered like his should never have bowed, and which I was wrong myself in submitting to. Did he not understand that he was imposing on me a part entirely wanting in openness and dignity, besides the increase of useless suffering? Could not one justly reproach me now with trifling with sacred feelings? My first interview with Mlle. Marguerite had sufficed to reveal to me all the severity of the test I am condemned to, but the death of M. Laroque has given a little naturalness to my relations with her, and propriety to my continued stay.

RENNES, October 26.

THE last word is spoken—My God! How strong was this tie! How it has rent my heart to break it!

Last night at nine o'clock I was surprised as I sat at my open window to see a faint light approaching my dwelling through the dark alleys of the park and from a different direction to that used by the servants at the chateau. An instant afterward some one knocked at my door, and Mlle. de Porhoet entered breathless. "Cousin," said she, "I have business with you."

I looked in her face. "Is there some new misfortune?"

"No, it is not exactly that. You shall judge of it yourself. Sit down, my dear child, you have spent two or three evenings at the chateau in the course of this week: have you observed anything new or singular in the bearing of the ladies?"

"Nothing."

"Have you not, at least, remarked in their faces an expression of unusual serenity?"

"Perhaps so, yes. Aside from the melancholy of their recent affliction, they have seemed to me calmer and even happier than formerly."

"Without doubt. You would have been struck by other peculiarities if you had, like me, lived for fifteen years in their daily intimacy. Thus I have lately often surprised some sign of secret intelligence of mysterious complicity between them. Besides, their habits are perceptibly changed. Madame Laroque has put aside her brasero, her easy-chair with its turret, and her innocent Creole fancies; she rises at fabulous hours, and seats herself with Marguerite, at their work-table. They have both become passionately fond of embroidery, and have inquired how much money a woman can earn daily at this kind of work. In short, it has been an enigma to which I have striven to discover the clew. This has just been disclosed to me, and without intruding upon your secrets, I have thought it right to communicate it to you without delay."

On my protestations of the entire confidence I would gladly repose in her, Mlle. de Porhoet continued in her sweet, firm style: "Madame Aubry came secretly to see me this evening; she began by throwing her two covetous arms around my neck, which greatly displeased me; then with a thousand jeremiads that I will spare you, she begged me to stop her cousins, who were on the brink of ruin. This is what she has learned by listening at the doors according to her delicate custom; these ladies are soliciting at this moment the authorization of giving all their property to a church at Rennes in order to destroy the inequality of fortune between Marguerite and you, which now separates you. Being unable to make you rich, they intend to make themselves poor. It seemed impossible, cousin, to leave you ignorant of this determination, equally worthy of those generous hearts, and those childish heads. You will forgive me for adding that your duty is to thwart this design at any cost. What repentance it prepares for our friends, what terrible responsibility it threatens you with, it is needless to tell you; you will understand it all as well as I, at first sight. If you could, my friend, receive Marguerite's hand at once, that would be the best ending in the world, but you are bound in this respect, by a promise which, blind, imprudent as it was, is none the less obligatory on you. There remains, then, only one thing for you to do, to leave this country without delay and to crush resolutely all the hopes your presence here inevitably keeps alive. When you are gone it will be easier for me to bring these children back to reason."

"Well! I am ready; I will set out this very night."

"That is right," she replied. "In giving you this advice, I have myself obeyed a very harsh law of honor. You charm the last hours of solitude; you have restored the illusions of the sweetest attachments of life, which I had lost for many years. In sending you away I make my last sacrifice, and it is very great." She rose and looked at me a moment, without speaking. "One does not embrace young men at my age," she resumed with a sad smile, "one blesses them. Adieu, dear child, may the good God help you!" I kissed her trembling hands, and she left me.

I hastily made my preparations for departure, then I wrote a few lines to Madame Laroque. I begged her to abandon a determination, the consequences and extent of which she could not measure, and to which I was firmly determined, for my part, to be in no way an accessory. I gave her my word—and she knew she could rely on it—that I would never accept my happiness at the price of her ruin. In conclusion, in order the better to divert her from her foolish design, I spoke vaguely of an approaching future where I pretended to see glimpses of fortune.

At midnight, when all were asleep, I said farewell, a painful farewell, to my retreat, to this old

tower, where I have suffered and loved so deeply! and I crept into the chateau, by a private door, the key of which had been confided to me. I stealthily crossed the galleries, now empty and resounding, like a criminal guiding myself as well as I could in the darkness; at length I reached the saloon where I had seen Marguerite for the first time. She and her mother could hardly have quitted it an hour before; their recent presence was betrayed by a soft sweet perfume that intoxicated me. I sought for and found her basket, in which her hand had just replaced her newly begun embroidery. Alas! my poor heart! I fell on my knees by her chair, and there, with my forehead throbbing against the cold marble of the table, I sobbed like an infant!

Oh! how I have loved her! I profited by the remaining hours of night to be secretly driven to the little neighboring town, where I took this morning the carriage for Rennes. Tomorrow night I shall be in Paris. Poverty, solitude, despair—all that I left there, I shall find them again! Last dream of youth, of heaven, farewell!

PARIS.

THE next morning as I was about going to the railroad, a post-chaise entered the courtyard of the hotel, and I saw old Alain descend from it. His face lighted up when he saw me. "Ah! monsieur, how lucky! you are not gone! Here is a letter for you!" I recognized the handwriting of M. Laubepin. He told me in two lines that Mlle. de Porhoet was seriously ill, and that she asked for me. I took time only to change horses, and threw myself into the chaise, compelling Alain, with great difficulty, to take the seat opposite me.

I then pressed him with questions, and made him repeat the incredible news he brought me. Mlle. de Porhoet had received the evening before an official paper conveyed to her by M. Laubepin, informing her that she was put in full and complete possession of the estates of her Spanish relatives. "And it seems," added Alain, "that she owes it to monsieur, who discovered in the pigeon-house some old papers which nobody knew of, and which have established the old lady's right and title. I do not know how much truth there is in that; but if it be so, the more pity, said I to myself, that she has got such ideas in her head about a cathedral, and which she will not let go of—for, take notice, that she holds to them more than ever, monsieur. At first, when the news came, she fell stiff on the floor, and it was thought she was dead; but an hour afterward she began to talk, without end or rest, about her cathedral, of the choir and the nave, of the chapter-house, and the canons, of the north aisle and the south aisle, so that, in order to calm her, an architect and masons were sent for, and all the plans of her cursed edifice were placed around her on her bed. At length, after three hours' conversation with them, she fell asleep; on waking she asked to see monsieur—Monsieur Marquis (Alain bowed, shutting his eyes), and I was sent after him. It seems she wishes to consult monsieur about the lobby."

This strange event caused me great surprise. But with the help of my memory, and the confused details given me by Alain, I arrived at an explanation of the matter which subsequent information soon confirmed. As I have before said, the question of the succession of the Spanish branch of the Porhoet family had two phases. There was, first, a protracted lawsuit between Mlle. Porhoet and a noble house of Castile, which my old friend lost on its final trial; then, a new suit, in which Mlle. de Porhoet was not involved, between the Spanish heirs and the crown, which claimed that the property in question devolved to it by escheatage. During these transactions, a paper fell into my hands, as I was pursuing my researches in the archives of the Porhoets, two months before my departure from the chateau. I will copy it literally.

"Don Philip, by the grace of God, King of Castile, Leon and Aragon, of the two Sicilies, Jerusalem, Navarre, Grenada, Toledo, Valencia, Galicia, Seville, Cordova, Cadiz, Murcia, Jaen, Algeiras, Gibraltar, the Canary Islands, the East and West Indies, Archduke of Austria, Duke of Burgundy, of Brabant and Milan, Count of Hapsburgh, Flanders, of Tyrol and Barcelona, seigneur of Biscay and Molina, etc.

"To thee, Horve Jean Jocelyn, sieur de Porhoet-Gael, Count of Torres Nuevas, etc., who hast followed me into my dominions, and hast served me with exemplary fidelity, I promised as a special favor that, in case of the extinction of thy direct and legitimate heirs, the property of thy house shall return, even to the detriment of the rights of the crown, to the direct and legitimate heirs of the French branch of the Porhoets-Gael, so long as it shall exist.

"And I promise this for me and my successors upon my faith and kingly word.

"Given at the Escorial, the 16th of April, 1716.

"YO EL REY."

Aside from this paper, which was only a translation, I found the original, bearing the royal seal. The importance of this document did not escape me, but I was fearful of exaggerating it. I doubted greatly whether the validity of a title, over which so many years had passed, would be admitted by the Spanish Government; I doubted also whether it would have the power, if it had the will, to make it good. I decided, therefore, to leave Mlle. de Porhoet in ignorance of a discovery, the result of which was so problematical, and limited myself to sending the title to M. Laubepin. Having received no news respecting it, I had forgotten it amidst the personal anxieties which had overwhelmed me. Contrary to my unjust suspicions, the Spanish Government had not hesitated to redeem the kingly promise of Philip V., and as soon as a supreme decree had adjudged the immense property of the Porhoets to

the crown, it nobly restored them to the legitimate heir.

It was nine o'clock at night, when I descended from the carriage at the threshold of the humble house where this almost royal fortune had so tardily come. The little servant opened the door. She was weeping. I heard the grave voice of M. Laubepin saying at the head of the staircase: "It is he!" I hastened up the stairs. The old man grasped my hand firmly, and led me into Mlle. de Porhoet's chamber, without speaking. The doctor and the cure of the town stood silently in the shade of the window. Madame Laroque was kneeling on a hassock near the bed; her daughter was at the bed's head, supporting the pillows upon which reposed the head of my poor friend. When the sufferer perceived me, a feeble smile spread over her features, now sadly changed; she extended one hand, but with evident pain. I took it as I knelt beside her, and I could not restrain my tears. "My child!" said she, "my dear child!" Then she looked earnestly at M. Laubepin. The old notary took up from the bed a sheet of paper, and appeared to continue an interrupted reading:

"For these reasons, I appoint by this will, written by my own hand, Maximilian Jacques Marie Odier, Marquis de Champcey d'Hauterive, noble in heart as well as by birth, general legatee of all my property both in France and in Spain, without reserve or condition. Such is my will.

"JOCELYNDE JEANNE, Countess de Porhoet-Gael."

In the excess of my surprise, I rose abruptly, and was about to speak, when Mlle. de Porhoet drawing my hand gently back, placed it in Marguerite's. The dear girl started at that sudden contact, and laying her blushing face on the pillow, whispered a few words into the dying woman's ear. For myself, I could not speak; I could only fall on my knees and thank God.

Several minutes passed thus in solemn silence, when Marguerite suddenly withdrew her hand from mine, and made a sign of alarm. The doctor approached hastily; I rose. Mlle. de Porhoet's head had fallen backward; her face was radiant with joy, and her eyes turned upward as if fixed on Heaven; her lips half opened, and she spoke as if in a dream: "Oh, God! Good God! I see it—up there! yes—the choir—the golden lamps—the windows—the sun, shining everywhere! Two angels kneeling before the altar—in white robes—their wings move—they are living!" This exclamation was smothered on her lips, on which the smile remained; she shut her eyes as if falling asleep, then suddenly a look of immortal youth spread over her face.

Such a death crowning such a life, was full of instruction to my soul. I begged them to leave me alone with the priest in the chamber. This pious watching will not be lost to me I hope. More than one forgotten or doubtful truth appeared to me with irresistible evidence upon that face stamped with a glorious peace. My noble and sainted friend! I knew that you had the virtue of self-sacrifice; I saw that you had received your reward!

Some hours after midnight, yielding to fatigue, I went to breathe the fresh air for a moment. I descended the staircase in the dark, and avoiding the saloon, where I saw a light, I entered the garden. The night was extremely dark. As I approached the turret at the end of the little enclosure, I heard a slight noise under the elm tree; at the same instant an indistinct form disengaged itself from the foliage. My heart beat violently, my sight grew dim, I saw the sky fill with stars. "Marguerite!" I said, stretching out my hands; I heard a little cry, then my name murmured softly, then—then I felt her lips meet mine!

I have given Helen half my fortune; Marguerite is my wife. I close these pages forever. I have nothing more to confide to them. That can be said of men, which has been said of nations: "Happy those who have no history!"

THE END.

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